MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY'S
FANTASY
Magazine
Issue #24
$4.50
Elisabeth Waters
Steven Piziks
Jill Pollock
An Interview with
Katherine Kurtz
0 74470 78279 7 24
Cover painting by David Cherry

The enchanting sequel to the *Mage Winds* trilogy:

Book One of The Mage Storms:
STORM WARNING
by Mercedes Lackey

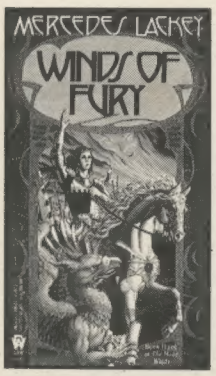
Best-selling author Mercedes Lackey captivated fans across the country with her phenomenal *Mage Winds* trilogy. Now, she continues this same storyline in STORM WARNING, the first volume of the *Mage Storms* trilogy.

In a war-ravaged Valdemar, Queen Selenay is attempting to effect a fragile new alliance with the neighboring kingdom of Karse. It is a venture that must not fail if either realm is to have any hope of surviving the coming confrontation with the massive armies of the ancient and enigmatic Eastern Empire. Forced to combat this mysterious and deadly foe, not only must two traditional enemies unite, but the Companions may at last be forced to reveal secrets which they have kept hidden for centuries...even from their beloved Heralds.

- Magnificent jacket art by Jody A. Lee
- Fully illustrated by artist Larry Dixon

★ DAW Fantasy 0-88677-611-2
$21.95 ($27.99 in Canada)

also available:



WINDS OF FURY: Book 3
of the *Mage Winds* trilogy
by Mercedes Lackey

★ DAW Fantasy
0-88677-612-0
$4.99 ($5.99 in Canada)

DAW Books, Inc.
Publishers of Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Horror Since 1971

For our complete Catalog listing hundreds of DAW titles in print, please write:
Elsie B. Wollheim, DAW Books, Inc.
375 Hudson Street, New York, NY 10014

Distributed by PENGUIN USA

DAW FANTASY

EDITOR
Marion Zimmer Bradley

PUBLISHER Rachel E. Holmen
DESIGN Art Weller

CLERICAL ASSISTANCE Heather Rose Jones, Stephanie Shaver
PROOFREADING Gil Lamont, Debbie Notkin

Issue #24 – Summer 1994 – Vol. 6 No. 4

MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY'S
FANTASY Magazine
ISSN 0897-9286
Published by the Marion Zimmer Bradley Living Trust
P.O. Box 249
Berkeley, California 94701
(510) 644-9222

SUBMISSIONS:
Marion Zimmer Bradley's *FANTASY Magazine* welcomes free-lance submissions from people who have read our guidelines. All submissions must be accompanied by a self-addressed envelope with adequate return postage. *FANTASY Magazine*, a quarterly, publishes original all new short fiction with fantasy elements in the range of 500 to 6,000 words. The most suitable length and the one most often purchased is between 2,500 and 5,000 words. While every precaution will be taken, we cannot assume liability for unsolicited manuscripts. A duplicate should be retained. Sample copies of the magazine are available for writers and artists at a special rate of $4.00 including postage and handling. Requests for WRITERS' GUIDELINES should include a self-addressed stamped envelope.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR:
All written comments, questions, and suggestions regarding any aspect of the magazine are read by our editor and are assumed to be intended for publication. We reserve the right to edit all submissions. Letters must include sender's name and address.

SUBSCRIPTIONS and BACK ISSUES:
Individual subscriptions are $16.00 for 4 issues in the U.S., $24.00 in Canada, $38.00 foreign subscriptions. All subscriptions, including Canadian, are payable directly in U.S. funds only. Individual copies of the current issue are $5.00 plus shipping. Shipping charges are $1.00 per copy in U.S., $2.00 in Canada, foreign $6.50. Back issues (#4 sold out) $4.95 each plus $2.50 per order shipping in U.S.

ADVERTISING:
Rates available on request.

BOOKSELLERS and SCHOOLS:
Discounts available. For information, call (510) 644-9222 or write to us.
Contents copyright © 1994 by Marion Zimmer Bradley Living Trust
Third class postage paid at Berkeley, CA.

POSTMASTER:
Send address changes to:
Marion Zimmer Bradley
P.O. Box 249
Berkeley, CA 94701

MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY'S

FANTASY

Magazine

EDITORIAL

We're six years old. (As in Milne's book of poetry, **NOW WE ARE SIX**.) Some of you came to the combined birthday party for both me and the magazine, held at Baycon. I'm sixty-four. And of course, being a child of my generation, I spent my birthday humming, "Will you still need me, will you still feed me, when I'm sixty-four?" (I admit I still like the early Beatles songs best.)

I really didn't know whether we could hold on this long or not. I'm always being asked why we don't use the big distribution agencies, and people complain that we're not carried on big city newsstands. The reason is simple. These distributors don't usually do returns. Their usual practice is to tear off covers, pulp the magazines, return the covers, and get full price for them. We *have* arranged to be carried by most sf specialty bookstores by dint of paying full price for returns.

And we do subscriptions. You can have your copy mailed to you, in an envelope, so nobody's eyetracks get on it. If you live overseas, you have to pay extra for postage. But we do have overseas subscriptions and get manuscripts from places like Siam and Borneo. Many of the subscribers are also would-be writers. I sometimes think that if everyone who sent me a story subscribed we'd be solvent. One of the things I get mad about is the people who have never seen an issue, but brag about sending their manuscript because — I kid you not — they are so sure it's just perfect for the magazine. Kids, that's my job. Don't sell me the story in the cover letter; I can read — and if you've done your part, I'll soon know if it's right for us. Skip sending me those hard-sell letters, especially those which confess you've never seen a copy but are so sure your stories are just right for it. Obviously, none of my readers would do that. But if you know somebody who's planning to send us a story, though she's never seen a copy, please shortstop her and and save me the chore of reading it. Maybe I'll have more time that way to consider *your* story. And while you're at it, buy your best friend a subcription. Or do you want just the perfect gift for those birthday cousins — whom you reckon up by dozens — or sisters and especially the aunts? Everybody has aunts; I had many.

Even Ernest, in the Oscar Wilde play.

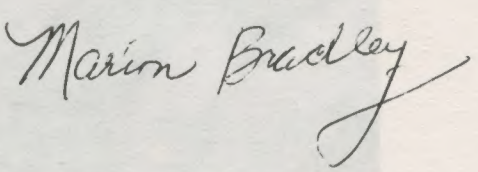
"Oh, sir, you had a mother once."

"Never!"

"Then you had an aunt. By the memory of that aunt I entreat you —"

At which Ernest, "visibly affected", gives in. (Although at this remove, I can't remember what he yielded.)

So now we are six — and who would have thought we would make it this far when we were very young?



MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY'S

FANTASY Magazine

Issue 24 Summer 1994

Page 14

Page 30

Cover Story

Ice Princess 4

by Elisabeth Waters; cover by David Cherry, interior art by James Balkovek

A skater finds she has a sister — and an enemy

The First Maxim 14

by Steven Piziks; art by Margaret Organ-Kean

Sorcery doesn't solve everything

The Kestrel's Tears 22

by Kimberly Egan; art by Dameon Willich

A falcon's love

Wishful Thinking 25

by Jill Pollock; art by Ann Chancellor

Sometimes "liberation" may not be what you wanted, exactly

Page 45

Page 52

Hero for a Day 30
by Rebecca Lloyd; art by Barb Armata
Local girl makes good

Bright Eyes 32
by Charles Gilman; art by George Barr
Revenge can come from even the smallest creature

No Greater Love 45
by Lisa Deason; art by Rob Alexander
A mermaid's tale

The Gargoyle's Burden 50
by L.S. Silverthorne; art by Armand Cabrera
An unusual rescue

The Price of Beauty 52
by Julie Newcomb; art by Gail Butler
Being beautiful may not be what it's cracked up to be

The Woodman's Tale 60
by Bob Dennis; art by Ray Capella
What would you do in this situation?

Regular Features

Marion Zimmer Bradley
Talks to Writers: My Very Own Slush Pile 38

Letters to the Editor 39

Interview with Katherine Kurtz 40
by Rachel E. Holmen

Results of the Cauldron 62

The Last Word 63
by Rachel E. Holmen

The Cauldron 64

ice princess

by
Elisabeth Waters

It was very cold when Sharon woke up. At first she thought that the heater in her cottage had stopped working — this happened occasionally, and it got cold before dawn this high in the mountains. Then she realized that there was a lot more light in the room than there should have been, considering the fact that she was supposed to be at the rink by 5:55 a.m. and on the ice by 6:00. I guess I shouldn't have stayed out so late last night, she thought. I must have slept through my alarm. Thank God I don't have a lesson on the first session. She groaned.

"Dost thou always sleep until the sun is halfway up the sky?" The voice was that of a very young girl.

Sharon didn't have a roommate, and children under age 18 weren't allowed in the cottages. Her eyes snapped open. It didn't help much; even with extended-wear contact lenses it took a few minutes to get the world in focus in the morning. And when it was in focus, it wasn't her world.

She was still in her own bed, and her bed table was next to it, but everything else had changed. Her room was gone; the bed and table now stood in the middle of a large round room with grey stone walls. There were four large windows at intervals in the walls, and a strong crosswind blew across the room, making Sharon's eyes feel as if the lenses were drying out and sticking to them. Fortunately she kept a bottle of saline solution on the bed table. She put a couple of drops in each eye and blinked several times. Excess salt water dripped down her cheeks, but now she could see the little girl sitting on the foot of her bed.

The child seemed to be about ten years old, and she looked exactly like Sharon herself had looked at that age. She had nondescript pale grey eyes, long brown hair, parted neatly in the middle, with a thick braid hanging over each shoulder, and she wore a long white dress with silver edging around a square neckline and a white shawl around her shoulders. She was shivering in the wind, but she didn't seem to notice.

"Art thou crying?" she asked curiously. "A princess is not supposed to cry. Mother says so."

Sharon felt as though she had fallen down a rabbit hole. "Where is your mother?"

"Our mother," the child corrected her. "Thou art my sister, Sharon, dost thou not remember?"

"I'm an only child," Sharon said. "And I've never met you before in my life. I'm sure. I'd remember anyone who talked the way you do." And I'm obviously dreaming, and I had better wake up before I do miss a lesson and my coach gets mad at me.

"The ice got her," the child said with a sigh. "The Ancient said that thou wouldst not remember, but I had hoped it was mistaken. Come, I shall take thee to it, and it can explain."

"What is the Ancient?" Sharon asked, swinging her legs over the side of the bed and feeling for her slippers. Fortunately they were there — and so was her skate bag, which she had dropped next to the bed last night. Apparently whatever had brought her here had brought along everything within a few feet of her as well. She rummaged in the bag and pulled out a pair of leg warmers and a hooded sweatshirt, a souvenir of her last skating competition.

"What dost thou?" the child asked.

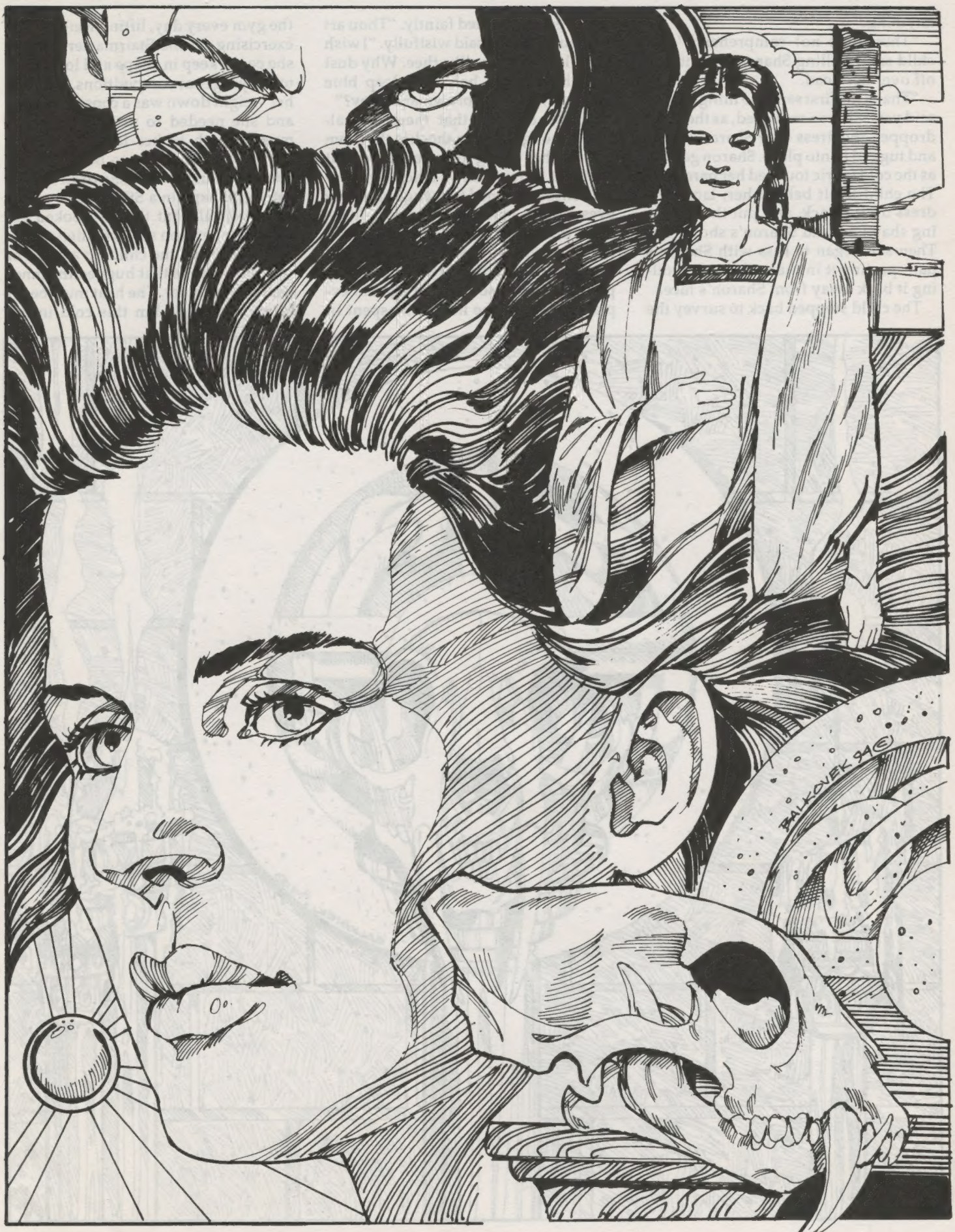
Sharon stared at her. "I'm putting on more clothes — what does it look like I'm doing? You must have noticed that it's cold in here."

"But that is not proper clothing!" the child protested. "The Ancient will not like it if thou comest before it looking like a..." the child's voice trailed off; obviously she was unable to find a description for what she thought Sharon looked like. "Thou art a princess, and thou must dress properly," she said earnestly. "I shall help thee," she added, picking up a dress and shawl like the ones she was wearing from the foot of the bed. "I regret that we have no servants at present—"

"Don't tell me, let me guess," Sharon said sarcastically, "the ice got them too."

The child nodded.

"Look, kid," Sharon said, "ice doesn't get people. Ice is just frozen water — it's not as if it could think for itself or



Artwork by James Balkovek

anything."

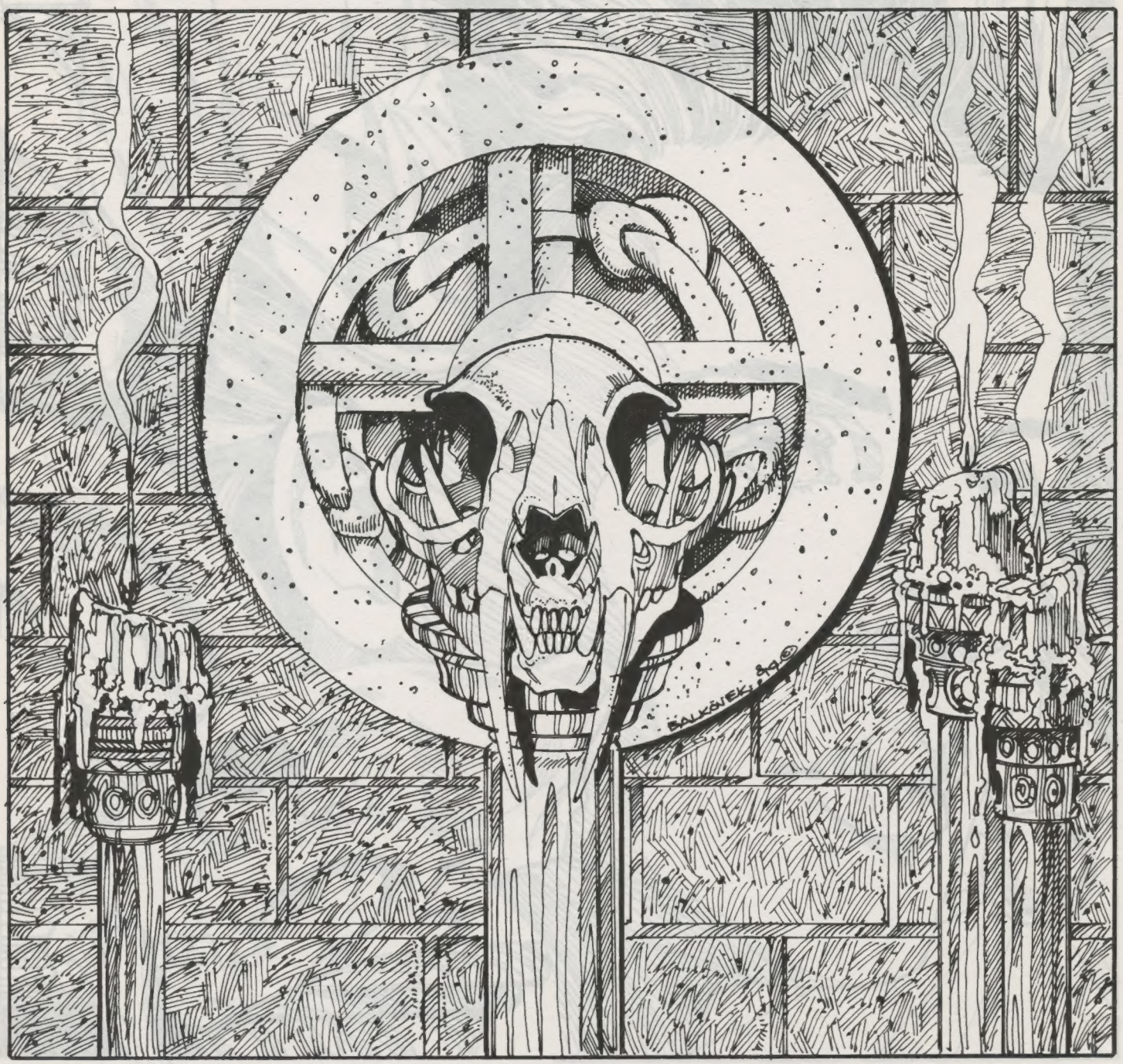
"Thou dost not comprehend," the child said, pulling Sharon's nightshirt off over her head.

"That's the first sensible thing you've said yet," Sharon muttered, as the child dropped the dress over Sharon's head and tugged it into place. Sharon gasped as the cold fabric touched her bare skin. The child knelt behind her, laced the dress up the back, and put the matching shawl around Sharon's shoulders. Then she began to fuss with Sharon's hair, parting it in the middle and coiling it back away from Sharon's face.

The child stepped back to survey the full effect and smiled faintly. "Thou art so beautiful," she said wistfully. "I wish that I looked more like thee. Why dost thou have black hair and deep blue eyes whilst I have brown and grey?"

Sharon decided that there was already enough culture shock in the room without her trying to explain dyes that changed brown hair to black and contact lenses designed to change pale grey eyes to any color one desired. It's a good thing I didn't get a set in purple, she thought with some amusement. That would probably really freak the poor kid. She also decided against explaining about the hours she spent in the gym every day, lifting weights and exercising on the Stairmaster, so that she could keep in shape and look good to the judges at competitions. Keeping her weight down was a constant battle, and she needed to maintain a lot of muscle, both in her legs and in her upper body, in order to be able to do spins and jumps. But she didn't think she could explain a Stairmaster to this child. For all that the girl looked exactly like her, she seemed alien.

She followed the child up a flight of cold stone stairs that hugged the inner wall of the Tower. The heat must be off in my cottage if I'm this cold in my



Artwork by James Balkovek

dreams, she thought idly. The child was breathing hard as they went up the stairs, but Sharon didn't find them particularly bothersome. Of course, Sharon was accustomed to running up and down a flight of seventy stairs to and from the rink several times a day.

They wound up in a room at the very top of the Tower. It had one small window off to the side, but mostly it was lit with candles, which were burning low and dripping wax all down the sides of the candle stands. The wall was the same grey stone as the rest of the Tower, but there was a design carved in a circle on one wall. It reminded Sharon a bit of the Celtic interlace pattern that she had seen on someone's skating dress recently. In front of the design was a wooden pedestal, and on the pedestal was a skull — apparently the skull of a saber-toothed tiger. Sharon yawned. For some reason she was very tired today, and sabertooths didn't interest her particularly. She had grown up near the La Brea Tar Pit, which was full of the darn things.

"Good morrow, Princess Morag, Princess Sharon," a voice said. It seemed to be coming from the skull, but the skull's jaws weren't moving. And besides, Sharon thought, skulls can't talk — especially skulls of extinct animals too dumb to stay out of the tar pits.

Good morrow, Ancient," the child, presumably Morag, said respectfully, apparently addressing the skull. "I have brought her here, as you instructed, but she remembers nothing."

"I warned you that such was likely to be the case," the voice said calmly.

"She speaketh most strangely," Morag continued, sounding puzzled, "and she hath wondrous strange clothing — and black hair and blue eyes. Are you certain that she is my sister?"

"Quite certain," the voice said. "It is time that I explained matters to Princess Sharon."

There were no chairs in the room, and Sharon had the feeling this was going to be a long story. She shrugged and flopped into a sitting position on the floor, leaning back against the wall opposite the skull. Morag, who was standing facing the skull with her hands clasped loosely together in front of her, cast Sharon a scandalized glance.

Sharon concluded that, once again, she had done something un-princess-like. So far the list seemed to include crying, dressing in clothing warm enough to prevent frostbite, and sitting on the floor. When she was growing up, Sharon had always dreamed of being a princess and living in a castle. Now she was rapidly concluding that being a princess was a drag and life in a castle was cold and uncomfortable. She wondered where the bathroom was, and if they ever ate around here. Probably the skull didn't, but Morag appeared to be a growing girl and thus presumably in need of food.

"Did Princess Morag tell you about the ice?" the skull asked.

"She said that it 'got' her mother and all the servants," Sharon replied. "That doesn't make sense to me."

Morag shuddered. "Ice is so strong and so smooth — there's nothing one can do to it."

Sharon giggled. "Strong and smooth? Ice?" She shook her head. "You've obviously never seen a rink after a freestyle session — between the toe-pick marks from jump take offs and the grooves in the ice from the landings, it's a real mess. I've seen little kids kick holes the size of my fist in the ice without even trying." She shrugged, and continued, "And of course, heat will melt it right back into water."

"Unfortunately," the skull said, "we do not get enough heat here now to melt ice."

"You mean you're having an ice age?" Sharon asked. "Glaciers coming out of the north and stuff like that?"

"No," the skull said. "Once, long ago, that did happen here. But now we have a different problem. We have a mage who can control the ice."

"And he's using it to kill everyone?" Sharon asked. "Isn't that sort of wasteful? I mean, can he cook? If he kills all the servants, he'll have to, won't he? Cook, and do his own laundry, and clean the castle..."

The skull interrupted her. "It is your destiny to stop him. That is why you were fostered in the other world, so that you would learn the powers needed to defeat him. The Queen your Mother foresaw this day."

"Thou hast twice my years," Princess Morag pointed out, "so thou must know many more spells that I do. I have studied all my life, but doubtless thou hast twice my knowledge."

"You mean magic?" Sharon looked at her incredulously. "We don't study magic in my world. Most people don't even believe it exists."

"Don't believe in magic?" Morag exclaimed in horror. "Ancient, how can a world without magic exist?"

"Calm yourself, Princess," the skull said sternly. Morag gulped and composed her features. "Princess Sharon's world has magic; they simply call it other things."

"Like what?" Sharon challenged it.

"Religion."

"You mean like witchcraft?" Sharon shook her head emphatically. "No way! I'm a Christian, not a witch."

"Do you attend Mass?" the skull asked.

"Of course I do!" Sharon said indignantly. "Every week."

"And you don't consider that to be magic? The Christian Mass is a very powerful act of ritual magic. Don't you feel different after receiving communion?"

Sharon had to think about that — she had always taken the effects of the sacrament for granted. "Well, yes, but—"

"Different how?" Morag asked eagerly.

"Stronger ... happier ... more in harmony with the world and the people around me ... closer to God..." Sharon had never tried to put it into words before. "I just feel better, that's all."

"Then you do know what magic is and what it feels like," the Ancient said. "With that and the physical strength and skills you have, you can accomplish the task before you."

"What task is that?" Sharon asked warily.

"When the Queen died," the skull explained, "the mage took her orb. He cannot use it, but as long as he keeps it away from Princess Morag, she cannot use it either. And she needs it if she is to survive."

"What's an orb?" Sharon asked.

"It is what gives the Queen her power," the skull explained. "It is what makes her the Queen."

"What about the King?" Sharon inquired.

"What is a king?" Morag asked.

I've heard of sheltered childhoods, Sharon thought, but this is ridiculous. "The Queen's husband," she said. Morag still looked blank. "Our father. What happened to him?"

"Father?" Morag didn't seem to know that word either.

"You don't have a father," the skull informed Sharon. "The Queen bears her daughters alone."

"Parthenogenesis?" Sharon asked incredulously.

"Yes," the skull replied.

"So that's why my hair and eye color bothers you," Sharon said, turning to Morag. "I'm supposed to look exactly like you, just older, right?"

"Yes," Morag said nervously. "Why dost thou not?"

"I'm a skater," Sharon explained, "and I skate in competitions, where part of what they judge you on is how you look. So I changed my hair and eye color to be more striking, and I work really hard to stay thin so that I'll look good in my costumes. If I didn't dye my hair and wear lenses that change my eye color, I would look just like you."

"Truly?"

"Yes, truly. When I was ten, I looked exactly the way you do now."

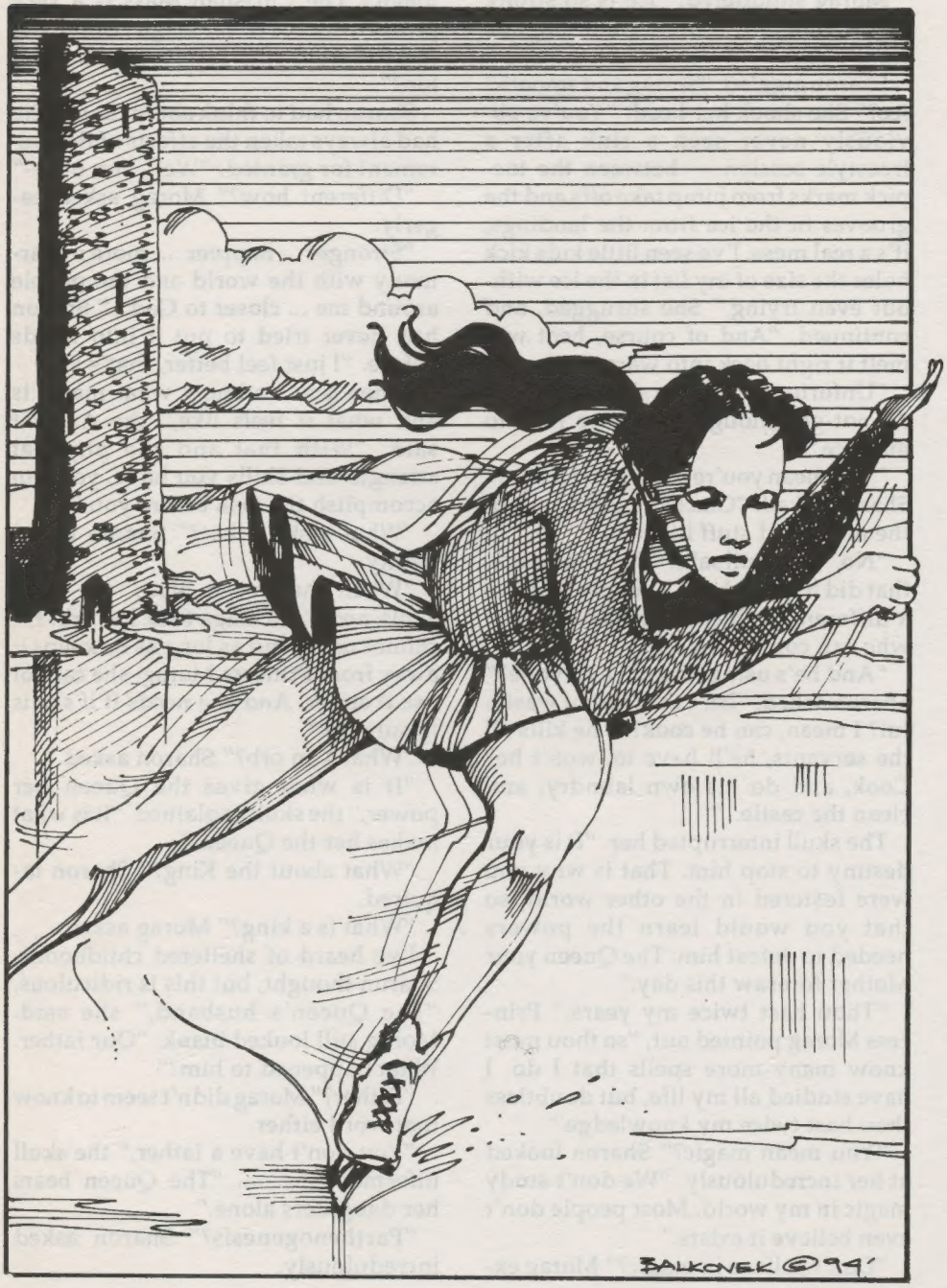
"So thou truly art my sister." Morag sounded immensely relieved.

"It looks that way." Sharon smiled reassuringly at the child.

"If you look unlike Princess Morag and the Queen," the skull said, "that should help in your quest. The mage will not immediately recognize you for what you are."

"Probably not," Sharon said. "Is he likely to try to kill me if he does?"

"He will try to kill you in any case," the skull said. "He has killed everyone who has left this Tower. But his powers are weaker during the day, so if you can get the orb back here by nightfall, you should survive."



Artwork by James Balkovek

This is definitely the strangest dream I've ever had in my life, Sharon thought. "Where is the orb, and what does it look like?" she asked.

"The Queen our Mother took it to the Temple," Morag said. "Yesterday was the longest day, when the orb is taken to the Temple to soak in the sunlight. The orb is a sphere, about this big," she held up her small hands, indicating something about two inches in diameter, "and it is made of translucent green stone."

"So you think the orb is still at the Temple?" Sharon asked.

Morag nodded. "I know it is. I can feel it; I have been able to ever since Mother died. I would know if it had been moved."

"So how do I find the Temple?" Sharon asked. "How far away is it?" She moved to look out the small window. The Tower was surrounded by a sea of ice as far as she could see, as if it were set in the middle of an enormous rink.

"I do not know." Morag looked confused. "Canst thou not feel it?"

"Feel what?" Sharon asked, feeling as confused as Morag looked. "The Temple? The orb?" She frowned. "If you can't tell me how to find it, you'll have to come with me and show me. Can you skate?"

"What is skating?" Morag asked.

"The Princess Morag cannot leave the Tower," the skull said firmly. "I shall have to link you together. Princess Sharon, come touch the top of my skull, right behind my eye socket."

Sharon looked dubiously at it, then shrugged. What can an old skull do to me, even if it can talk? She gingerly touched the tip of her index finger to the skull. It felt as if a strong electric current was running through her, from the top of her head and the soles of her feet through her finger and into the skull. She tried to pull her hand away, but she couldn't move at all. Suddenly this seemed less like a dream and more like a very strange reality.

"Princess Morag," the skull said. Its voice seemed to echo inside Sharon's head. The Morag touched the skull, and Sharon abruptly realized what it had meant by 'link together.' She was looking at the skull through two sets of

eyes, until she hastily squeezed her own shut, leaving her looking across the skull from Morag's viewpoint and giving her an excellent view of her terrified face.

"Fear not, Sharon." She heard Morag's voice in her head, and she knew that neither of them was moving her lips. "Open thine eyes."

Sharon cautiously opened her eyes to narrow slits. As she did so, her vision through Morag's eyes went away. She opened her eyes the rest of the way, and discovered that the feeling in her body was returning to normal and she could move again. She backed cautiously away from the skull.

"The link is in place," Morag said. "Thank you, Ancient." She bowed slightly to the skull.

"Uh, thanks," Sharon added. I think.

"Come, Sharon," Morag took her hand and dragged her toward the stairs. "If thou art to return by dark, thou must leave very soon."

The girls went down the stairs together, much faster than they had come up them. Morag was obviously in a hurry now. "Canst thou feel the orb now?" she asked.

Sharon concentrated as much as she could while hurrying down the stairs. "I can feel something out that way," she admitted, pointing, "but I'm not sure what it is."

"That is the correct direction," Morag said. "And now I can see what thou seest and speak to thee without speaking aloud, so I can tell thee the way if thou losest it."

"About this wizard—" Sharon began.

"Mage," Morag corrected her.

"Whatever. What are his weaknesses? Is there any way to kill him?"

"He likes not sunlight and warmth," Morag said, "but, beyond that, I do not know." She looked anxiously up at Sharon. "I hope that thou wilt not encounter him."

"Me too." They reached the room where Sharon's bed was. "I'm going to get dressed," she said. "Can you fix me some food to take with me? I haven't had anything to eat since dinner last night, and I'm starved!"

"Fasting makes our link stronger," Morag said.

"Skating with no food makes me fall down a lot," Sharon pointed out. "You can fast if you want, since you're staying here, but I'm going to be out there moving around and using energy. I need food."

"Very well," Morag agreed. "I shall fetch thee some bread." She left the room and continued down the stairs.

"Well, bread is better than nothing," Sharon sighed, "but it's certainly enough to make me appreciate the food back at the training center. I wonder if they can send me back when I've got the orb for them." She dropped the shawl on the bed and tried to get out of the dress. "For that matter, I wonder if I can unlace this wretched dress." She struggled unsuccessfully with it for several minutes before Morag came back with a tray.

"Here," she said, handing Sharon a hunk of bread. It was lumpy and coarse, but Sharon was too hungry to care. "I'll unlace the dress for thee," Morag continued. She had it undone before Sharon could take more than three bites of bread.

Sharon set the bread aside, dumped her skate bag on the bed, and began to select and hastily put on clothing. Even though it must be almost noon, it was still very cold in the room. She pulled on a pair of beige tights and a skating dress that so horrified Morag by its short skirt and bright colors that her thoughts came through to Sharon even though she wasn't deliberately projecting them.

"No, Morag," Sharon explained, "a virgin in my world can wear colors other than white. The color of my clothing says nothing at all about my character or my morals."

She put on the hooded sweatshirt with a pocket across its front, shoved her gloves in the pocket for the moment, and sat down on the edge of the bed to lace on her skates. Since the blades were covered by plastic guards, she could walk on them indoors, and it was certainly easier to put them on while sitting on a bed than it would be sitting on the ice outside the Tower door.

She shoved her water bottle, which was almost completely full, and all the bread she could fit into the pocket, picked up the piece she had been eating, and headed toward the stairs. "All right, Morag, show me the way out of here."

Morag led her down the rest of the stairs to a small door at the base of the Tower. She opened it, and the ice stretched out in front of Sharon. In spite of the seriousness of the situation, Sharon smiled. The ice was flat and smooth, just the way she liked it. She removed her blade guards and crammed them in next to her water bottle as she stepped carefully onto the ice. She skated a few curves to see how this ice felt against her blades, and smiled at Morag. "It's good ice," she said reassuringly, "hard and fast. I should be able to make good time to the Temple."

"I'll stay linked and keep watch," Morag promised. "Be careful."

Sharon stroked towards the Temple. The land was almost completely level, so it wasn't very different from being on a rink, except that this 'rink' really did seem to go on forever. She looked back at the Tower to see how far she had come and gasped in surprise. She knew that Tower. It was part of an old ruin called The Castle, not far from the Training Center. The Tower was the only part of the ruin that still stood, and there were all sorts of rumors about the place: that it had been an insane asylum, or a sanitarium for patients with tuberculosis, or that Satanists still used it for their rituals. Sharon had been there a few times with her boyfriend John, but only once at night. At night, it was a spooky place.

"Sharon?" Morag's voice whispered in her head. "Is something amiss?"

"Amiss?" It took Sharon a second to place the word. "No, Morag, it's okay. Nothing's wrong. The Tower just looks familiar, that's all — there's one like it in my world."

"It is probably one of the gates between our worlds," Morag thought calmly.

Sharon decided she didn't want to think about gates between worlds at the moment. She turned her back on the Tower and continued toward the Temple, chewing on another piece of bread as she skated. By the time she saw the Temple in front of her, she had finished all the bread and about half her water, but the food had made her feel better. Her legs ached slightly from all the stroking, but not enough to inconvenience her.

As she came to the final approach to the Temple, she heard a gasp of horror in her head. Looking at what lay ahead, she could understand it. There was a deep gorge between her and the Temple, and the only bridge across it was about three inches wide — and at least fifteen feet long. She could feel terror well up inside her, but she real-

ized that most of it was not hers. "Morag, relax," she thought at her little sister. "This is nothing to be afraid of."

"What if you fall?" It was the wail of a terrified child.

"I'm not going to fall. I've had to do harder things than this on beginning tests, and I've passed senior level." She backed up a bit so that she could get up to speed; there wasn't going to be any way to cheat on this maneuver. "I've had to do a spiral on a flat edge for at least four times my body length, and this is only about three."

"What's a spiral?"

"Just watch." Sharon pushed off strongly. Left, right, left, right. She hit the bridge in a perfect flat spiral position, right foot even on both edges of her skate blade, chest and left leg parallel to the ice, with the left leg turned out from the hip and the toe pointed, head up and facing into the breeze created by the air she was moving through, and arms outstretched to the sides, arching her chest slightly. It was definitely one of the best spirals she had ever done, and it carried her smoothly over the bridge in the space of a single breath. As soon as she reached the Temple entrance, an area about three feet square, she dropped her left foot to the ice, pulled her arms in, and converted her remaining momentum into a two-foot spin. She stopped it with a toe-pick into the ice, and threw back her head, laughing softly in delight. "That felt good!" she thought.

"Yes," Morag's thoughts were wistful, "it did."

Sharon skated to the doorway and looked at the stone floor of the Temple, then up at the sun, which was halfway down to the horizon. I'd better hurry, she thought. Picking up her right foot, she ran her fingers along the blade to remove the excess ice, then pulled the blade guards from her pocket and fitted one over the right blade. She repeated the procedure with her left skate and walked into the Temple.

She passed through a small anteroom and into the main hall, which had a skylight in the center of the ceiling. On an altar under the skylight a woman lay on her back, holding a green sphere in her cupped hands. The sphere glowed faintly in the sunlight, despite the fact that both woman and sphere were covered with at least an inch of ice.

Sharon didn't need Morag's cry of "Mother" bouncing through her skull to recognize the woman. That's what I'd look like, she realized, if I weren't a skater. The woman's eyes were closed, but Sharon had no doubt they were the same pale grey as hers and Morag's. The brown hair, with a few strands of white mixed in, was parted in the center and coiled back as Morag had tried to do with Sharon's — which had come loose while she was skating and now hung every which way about her head. The woman looked peaceful, like an illustration of Sleeping Beauty or Snow White in a book of fairy tales.

"Are you sure she's dead?" Sharon wondered.

"Hast thou never seen a dead body before?" Morag sounded surprised.

"Well, no, never," Sharon admitted.

"Look at her arms," Morag instructed. "See how her hands and forearms are white, but the backs of her upper arms look bruised? After death, the blood flows to the lowest part of the body and stays there. She's dead, and she's been dead since last night. I felt her die." Sharon felt a faint flicker of emotional pain, quickly covered by annoyance. "Just get the orb and get out of there, before the mage finds you!"

Sharon frowned at the orb. The Queen was not grasping it; it rested on top of her open hands, but it was still covered with ice, and there was nothing in the room to chip it out with. Nothing except my skate blades, Sharon thought. She removed the guard from her right blade, put her gloves on so that she could hold onto the ice-covered body for balance, and swung her leg over the body. A few good whacks with the heel of her blade chipped away the ice that held the orb in place at the bottom, but most of it was still covered with ice when she pulled it free. She shoved it into her pocket and put her blade guard back on. "What about our mother's body?" she thought to Morag.

"Leave it," Morag replied, "just get back here as quickly as thou canst!"

Nonetheless, Sharon bowed her head over the body for a moment and said a quick prayer for the repose of the Queen's soul. Then she walked quickly out of the Temple.

She frowned as she looked at the bridge. With the small patch of ice on this side, she didn't think she could get up enough speed to be sure of getting back across it in a spiral. And it was too narrow to crawl along. A balance beam is wider, Sharon thought in disgust. How do people usually get in and out of here?

She would just have to sit straddled across it and pull herself along with her hands. That would be slow and a bit precarious, especially for the contents of her pocket. She pulled out the ice-covered orb and gritted her teeth. There was no help for it; the safest place for the orb was down the front of her skating dress. If she tied the next of her sweatshirt tightly, the orb would stay with her even if she wound up hanging upside down. She loosened the neck of the sweatshirt and quickly shoved the orb down the front of her dress, tucking it under the waistband of her tights. The cold made her eyes fill with tears, but at least it was secure now. She pulled up the hood of her sweatshirt and tied the drawstring at the neck.

Dragging herself across the 'bridge' seemed to take forever, but eventually she crawled onto the ice at the other side, moved away from the gorge, stood up, and started stroking back to the Tower.

The sun was halfway below the horizon as she approached the Tower, and Morag had been getting steadily more agitated for the past half-hour. Now she continually urged Sharon to hurry, and Sharon was getting a headache. "Can't you be quiet?" she thought, trying to project reassurance. "You're starting to make me nervous!"

"He's coming," Morag whispered. "I can feel him."

"Damn!" Sharon muttered. The ice was starting to crack around her, and a two-foot-wide fissure opened up in her path, between her and the Tower.

She remembered her coach teaching her a jump called a Falling Leaf. "Pretend you're jumping over a mud puddle," he had said. She turned quickly to glide backwards on two feet toward the fissure, pushing a couple of times with the side of one foot to build up speed. Just before she reached it, she twisted her head and upper body to the left to look behind her and picked up her left foot and held it at the back of her right ankle. As she reached the very edge of the fissure, she jumped off her right foot, reaching out with her left foot and both arms. While she didn't think this jump had quite the graceful floating quality of a falling leaf that its originator had in mind, it did get her safely into the Tower courtyard.

Then Morag's voice in her head said in warning. "He's here!"

The sun was almost completely below the horizon by now, but Sharon had excellent night vision. (The lamps on the stairway down from the rink were always getting broken, so she had plenty of practice in navigating hazardous terrain with almost no light.) She could see the man standing on the doorstep to the Tower, even though he was dressed in black. Black leather boots went up to his knees, black trousers were tucked into them, and he wore a black silk blouse slit open almost to his waist. Obviously the cold didn't bother him.

He looked to Sharon like a cross between the latest in teenage fashion and the cover of a romance novel, which meant that she didn't feel the automatic fear of him that Morag obviously did. Besides, it was late, she was tired, cold, and hungry; and he was between her and her dinner and bed. She pushed off hard onto her left foot on an outside edge which started her arcing away from him to his left. She prayed that he didn't know enough about skating to realize that the track she was on was going to take her right to him. Although she was moving as quickly as she could, time seemed to slow down, as if she were doing this in slow motion. She leaned into her edge, bending her left knee as deeply as she could, and stretched forward into a position similar to the spiral she had used earlier, except that this time her left arm was directly in front of her left knee. She raised her head just enough to be sure that he wasn't trying to get out of her way, but he stood unmoving, looking amused. When she was almost close enough for her hand to touch him, she snapped her left arm back and rose up on her knee, putting her body into what would have been a beautiful camel spin — if she hadn't hit him squarely in the sternum with the toe-picks of her right skate.

Sharp pointed stainless steel met bare flesh. His screams were deafening. Sharon had seen people get spiked with a skate blade before (it didn't happen often, thank God, but it did happen occasionally), but this was the first time she had ever heard anyone howl as if he were being burned alive.

She picked herself up from the ice, where she had landed on her hands and knees when her momentum was halted so abruptly, and twisted to look at him. Oddly enough, he did seem to be being burned alive. What she could see of his skin was cracking and bubbling, radiating out from where her skate blade had hit him. She watched in bewilderment as his screams died away and his entire body turned into a pile of ashes.

Artwork by James Balkovek

When she was certain he was no longer a threat, she put her blade guards back on, stepped over the pile of empty clothes, and went into the Tower, where Morag had been hovering just inside the door waiting for her.

"Is he dead?"

"It certainly looks that way." Sharon untied the neck of her sweatshirt and fished the orb out of the front of her skating dress. The ice covering it was down to a thin film in most places except for the bottom, which was bare. "Here's your orb, little sister." She handed it to Morag, then stripped off her gloves. Let's go upstairs; I want to get out of my skates and into some dry clothing. She led the way up to her room. Morag followed her, cradling the orb and gazing at it as if it held the mysteries of the universe.

Sharon stripped off her skating clothes and, for lack of anything else to wear, put the white dress on again. Morag set the orb down long enough to lace the dress for her, then resumed her

study of it. Sharon pulled her towel out of the pile of stuff on the bed and carefully dried her skate blades, then put terry cloth soakers on them to keep them from getting nicked when she put them back in her bag. She hung her wet dress, tights, and sweatshirt over the foot board of the bed.

Morag stood up abruptly. "We have to go see the Ancient."

"All right," Sharon said. "I want to ask if it knows why the mage burned up like that."

She followed Morag up the stairs again, back to the room at the top of the Tower. By now the skull looked like a old friend. "Good evening, Ancient," she said. "Do you know what happened to the mage?"

"I could feel something," it replied. "Tell me."

Sharon described what she had seen to the best of her ability. "Why did he burn up like that?" she finished.

"What are your skate blades make of?" the skull asked.

"Stainless steel."

"Does this 'steel' have iron in it?"

Sharon frowned. "I think so. Why?"

"The mage must have had elven blood," the skull said. "Elves are the only creatures I have ever heard of that burn when exposed to iron. Did you hit him hard enough to draw blood?"

"I couldn't see blood through the burns," Sharon said, "but I must have. Toe picks are sharp and I hit him hard on bare skin."

"That would carry the iron burn through his entire body then," the skull concluded. "You did well."

Sharon bit her lip. "I've never killed anyone before — and I didn't mean to kill him. Murder is a mortal sin."

"I think if you ask your priest, he will tell you that elves do not have souls," the skull said soothingly. "Therefore, killing him was no more murder than killing a venomous spider."

"Oh." That made Sharon feel a bit better. "So what happens to me now?"

"Do you wish to stay here?" the skull asked. "Now that the mage is gone, the ice should melt and the land will be fair once again."

Sharon thought about it. She was a princess and she could stay here in the Tower and be a princess. But if the ice melted, she would have no place to skate, and even if it didn't, her coach and her friends were all back in her own world. And in this world she had no father and her mother was dead, and she had no memories of her mother save as a dead body. In her own world, she had parents who loved her, even if they weren't her biological parents. And in her own world she had her boyfriend, while here they would probably expect her to reproduce by parthenogenesis — assuming that she was allowed to have children at all. She might be a princess, but Morag was to be Queen. Morag was a nice kid, but the idea of life with only Morag and a talking skull for company was a bit daunting. "I want to go home," Sharon said, "back to my own world."

"Very well," the skull replied. "Morag can send you back as soon as she masters the orb."

"How long will that take?" Sharon looked at Morag, who was frowning down at the orb.

"I fear it is broken," Morag said. "I cannot feel anything from it."

"What?" Sharon yelped. "After what I went through to get that thing, it had better not be broken! Let me see it." She lifted the orb out of Morag's unresisting hands — and nearly dropped it, as a flood of emotions and images swept through her. She shoved it back into Morag's hands and dropped to the floor, putting her head between her knees and hoping she wasn't going to faint. She had never felt so dizzy in her life, even when she first started learning to do spins.

"Morag," she said firmly. "That orb is not broken."

"Then why do I feel nothing from it?"

"Ancient?" Sharon appealed to the skull.

"I cannot help you with this," the skull replied. "Morag must master the orb herself — or you must."

Sharon frowned as she looked at Morag. "You don't feel anything from the orb?" Morag shook her head. "What do you feel?" Sharon asked. "Not from the orb — from anyplace, from inside yourself."

"Nothing." Morag looked blank and tired. "What am I supposed to feel?"

"What did you feel when you realized your mother was dead?"

"I knew I had to get the orb. That's why we brought you here."

"No," Sharon said. "You're missing the point. Not what did you do, what did you feel."

"A Princess does not cry," Morag said, as if by rote. "A Princess does not let feelings get in the way of what must be done."

"Maybe it's different for a Queen," Sharon suggested. "Maybe your lack of feelings is what's keeping you from feeling the orb."

"So how am I supposed to feel?" Morag asked.

"You know," Sharon said. "You're just fighting it. Stop fighting your feelings, and the orb will work for you just fine." She fought unsuccessfully to keep from yawning. "I've had a long day," she said. "I'm going to bed. You might try that too; sleep might help you. Good night, Morag. Good night, Ancient."

Good night, Princess Sharon," the skull said.

Sharon stumbled off to bed. She was too tired to struggle with the task of unlacing the white gown, so she slept in it.

Sometime in the early hours of the morning, Sharon woke up. Morag was standing next to the bed, crying her eyes out. "My mother is dead," she sobbed. Sharon sat up, reached out and put her arms around the child.

"I know," she said, starting to cry herself.

"I know how to use the sphere now," Morag sobbed. "But it hurts! And I shall have to use it to send thee home, and I shall miss thee!"

Sharon held Morag and rocked her in her arms until the girl fell asleep, then lay down next to her and went back to sleep herself.

Her alarm was ringing, and it was barely dawn. Sharon sat up in bed, switched off the alarm, and put saline solution in her eyes. Boy, that was a weird dream, she thought. Then she looked down at the white dress she was still wearing, at her skating cloths and sweatshirt hanging on the foot board of the bed, and at the mess which had been a neatly packed skating bag. It wasn't a dream, she realized, and I'm going to be late for my session if I don't hurry. And if I do hurry, I'll have time to eat breakfast first.

That was incentive. With concentration and the use of the large mirror in the bathroom, she managed to get out of the dress unaided. She threw on the first clean skating outfit that came to hand, ran a brush through her hair, and put a skirt over her skating dress so that she could go to breakfast. As she ate a double helping of pancakes with lots of syrup, she noted the date on the morning news show playing on the

television. I haven't lost a day, she discovered with relief. That's good, I can explain why I'm so tired much more easily than I can explain why I was missing for 24 hours.

She dragged herself through her day's skating, then called John. "Can you take me over to The Castle this evening?" she asked him. "There's something I want to see there."

"Yeah, sure."

John came for her right after dinner, and they went to the old Tower. It was dark by then, so they didn't get too close. But they were close enough for Sharon to see Morag standing next to the window in the middle of the Tower, holding the orb and smiling down at her.

❄

ELISABETH WATERS had her first novel, **CHANGING FATE**, published this past April by DAW, and has had stories in previous issues of *MZBFM*, in several Sword and Sorceress anthologies, and in Darkover anthologies. She lives in Berkeley, California, where she also works as Marion Zimmer Bradley's secretary.

JAMES BALKOVEK recently relocated his studio to Quincy, California, where he sees foxes, bears, and wolves on a regular basis. He did the cover for issue #10 and was an art director for the Mervyn's department store chain.

DAVID CHERRY used to be a lawyer but left that well-paid profession to be an artist. He was probably encouraged by his sister, writer C.J. Cherryh (who had also been his Latin teacher). David has served as President of ASFA, the artist's organization, where his legal and negotiating skills proved useful. He lives in Oklahoma and was recently married; he and his wife have two daughters, one from her first marriage and one born April 7, 1994.

Artwork by James Balkovek

The First Maxim

"You are the Fraud?" the sorceress asked.

Aleksa swallowed her distaste and grandly swirled her scarlet cloak in the torchlight behind her wagon. In the city beyond, the town guard was sounding the horns which warned that the gates would close within the hour.

"Aleksanandra the Fraud at your service, Eminence," she said with a low bow.

The sorceress tapped a long finger on the arm of her chair and it sank gracefully to the grass. "My name is Leore and I want to hire you. What do you charge?"

Aleksa managed by sheer force of will to keep her face stoic. The offer couldn't have come at a better time, but that didn't change who was offering it.

Perform for one of her kind? she thought. *It would be like performing for Father. I couldn't. I won't.*

Aleksa's stomach chose that moment to growl, reminding her exactly how long it had been since she had last eaten. She sighed to herself.

All right, she muttered inwardly. *So do it and get it over with.*

"What do I charge, milady?" she said aloud in her grandest performance voice. "Why, that depends." She gestured and a flash of light puffed from her right hand. "The merely difficult will cost but a pittance. While the miraculous — "

A cloud of smoke enveloped her. Aleksa hurriedly snatched off her cloak and turned it inside-out. With practiced ease, she used its hidden buttons and snaps to transform it into a sky-blue gown. She yanked it over her head, dusted the flashpowder from her palms, and ran a quick hand through her dark brown hair a split second before the smoke cleared.

"The miraculous," Aleksa concluded, "would be a bit more expensive." *Try that without your precious magic, sorceress.*

Leore's sharp, angular face did not change expression but Aleksa noticed the slight shift in posture as the sorceress leaned almost imperceptibly forward. Her legs and feet, however, did not move in the slightest.

"I'm not looking for the impossible," she said. "I'm looking for a solution to my problem."

Aleksa raised an eyebrow. *Solution? I thought she wanted a performance.* "Problem, Eminence?"

"The House of Domitien," Leore said in a neutral voice, "has kidnapped my son. Kirill Domitien first demanded money, which I paid. Then he demanded certain books of power. I gave them to him." The sorceress took a large emerald from one pocket and held it up so it glittered green in the torchlight. "Now he wants this. Obviously Kirill Domitien has no intention of returning my son to me, so I want you to get him back."

Aleksa stared. "Me?" she blurted, forgetting stage presence for the moment. "You want *me* to rescue your son? Eminence, forgive me, but I'm no...magician." She curled her lip at the last word. "I'm just a Fraud. Everything I do is a trick. An illusion. And that's the truth."

"Which is exactly why I want you. You can't cast spells." Leore fixed Aleksa with a hard look and her stone-white hair formed an unmoving corona about her head. "Or perhaps I should say," she continued, "you can't cast *conventional* spells."

Aleksanandra blinked. "What? Eminence, I — "

The sorceress gestured impatiently and her chair rose from the ground until Leore's head was level with Aleksa's.

"When Kirill Domitien kidnapped Royden," Leore growled, "my first reaction was to destroy his House. But he learned somewhere how to weave a

by Steven Piziks

Artwork by Margaret Organ Kean

barrier around his mansion that stops my every spell. My second reaction was to hire assassins, but Domitien told me he had, for the moment, linked my son's life force to his. So Royden...my son — " Leore's voice almost, but not quite, quavered, "my son is still in that damned House."

"Eminence, I still don't see — "

"Don't you?" Leore leaned forward. "There are...rumors about you Frauds. You claim every trick is mere sleight-of-hand or misdirection and you challenge your audience to figure out how each is done. But I've heard that Frauds do work magic — a secret magic. One that can't even be detected by sorcery." Her eyes narrowed. "I travelled to Iddan Town last week to see your performance. Impressive. I was positive your tricks were impossible without magic, so I looked at you with Third Sight. Not only could I find no trace of sorcery about you, Aleksanandra, my Sight couldn't even *see* you." The tension in her voice rose. "No one can hide from Sight without using sorcery. No one. The rumors of Fraud magic would seem to be true."

Aleksa shook her head. *For a sorceress, woman, you're impossibly dense. And you interrupt.* "Eminence, I said very clearly at the beginning of my performance that the Frauds Guild only accepts people who have no magical talent whatsoever." *And they destroy it in those who do.* She closed her eyes briefly, remembering the pain. *Happy now, Father? It was your fault, after all.* "Eminence, I couldn't even begin to — "

"You *will* help me, Fraud," Leore suddenly hissed. "I don't care what oath of secrecy you might have sworn." She gestured at Aleksa's wagon and the old mule hitched to the front. "Do you think I don't know your position? I had intended to contact you earlier, but the troupe you travel with was run out of Iddan Town because a remark you made, Fraud, offended the sensitivities of the baron's wife. The baron confiscated the purse of the entire troupe. That hurt, didn't it? They went on to Kharshina, but you parted with the company and came this way — punishment, perhaps? A fortunate stroke for me, certainly." The sorceress narrowed her flinty gray eyes. "Being run out of another town would destroy you. I can arrange for it to happen again. But I won't — if you do as I say."

Aleksa stared at Leore and fought down a growing anger. *The bitch. Gods, she's just like Father — has to control everything around her. Her son isn't what matters to her. She just can't stand the idea that this Kirill Domitien has a hold on her. But she's convinced I can help her, so she's going to make sure I have to. Her stomach growled again. Even though I can't.*

"All right then," Aleksa said aloud, stalling. "What if I do get your son back? What's in it for me?"

Leore leaned back in her chair. "I'll give you five thousand in gold. Or whatever else you desire, if I can grant it."

Aleksa swallowed. That was more money than the entire troupe took in over twenty seasons.

"But if you fail," the sorceress went on in a hard-edged voice, "I run you out of town again."

Aleksa clenched a sudden fist. For a moment she was fourteen again, standing before her father.

"You're all the same, aren't you?" she snarled. "Can't ask nicely, can't trust someone to do the job unless *you're* in control. All right, *sorceress*, I'll show you magic. Fraud magic. Magic that'll make your watery glamours look like a puddle of mud, that's the truth." She snatched the emerald from Leore's startled hand. "You just wait here. When I'm done, Kirill Domitien will *beg* you to take your brat back."

Aleksa stormed up the steps into her wagon and slammed the door before the sorceress could react. Fuming, she slapped the emerald on the tiny table inside, then threw herself onto the bench beside it.

The interior of Aleksa's tiny wagon was dark and chilly — she had run out of oil for the heat lamp days ago. She reached for a candle instead and the emerald gleamed dully on the table a moment later. The dim candlelight had a calming effect on her temper and she sighed heavily. A vague prickling nibbled at the base of her skull, but Aleksa ignored it — there was no way Leore's sorcery could spy on her, not without some small spark of inner magic for the spell to latch onto, and Aleksa had none. The Frauds Guild had seen to that.

Stupid, Aleksa, she thought. *Really stupid. Performance Maxim Six: never promise something you can't deliver. And now I've got to do just that.*

Aleksa got up and quickly shrugged out of her cloak-turned-gown and the colorful, tight-fitting performance outfit beneath so she could pull on tunic and shoes instead. The prickling, she noticed, had subsided.

Gave up because you can't See me, eh? Aleksa thought. *Of course, that only reinforces the misconception that I work some sort of magic. Don't I wish. It must be nice to be a sorceress — just wave your hand and you get whatever you want.* Aleksa snorted. *Right. Father wasn't able to stop me from running to the Frauds Guild. Even so, this woman waves her hand and expects me to give her what she —*

Aleksa stopped in mid-thought. Her eyes flicked back and forth as if she were reading something on the empty air. Then she laughed softly.

Performance Maxim Two: give the audience what they want. She wants magic? I'll give her magic.

Aleksa reached beneath the bed, pulled out a long, low trunk, and opened it. Inside was a formidable collection of jars, bottles, and other paraphernalia.

Flashpowder supply is getting low, she noted absently, rummaging through the glassware. *Have to find a bat colony soon. Now where? Here it is.* She came up with a small jar filled with clear oil. Resting on the bottom were three whitish stones about the size of a fingernail. Carefully, Aleksa used a pair of tweezers to pluck one from the jar. She patted the oil away with a handkerchief, then dropped the emerald and the white stone into another jar filled with water. From the trunk she took another small jar, a set of tongs, a pair of thick leather gloves, and the tiny set of tools she used in her escape act. Then she donned a plain gray cloak and took the jar outside.

Leore was staring down at the city, her back to the wagon, but the chair whirled around the moment Aleksa emerged.

"What were you doing in there?" she demanded.

A bit edgy, are we? "I was getting the curse ready, Eminence," Aleksa replied coolly.

"Curse?"

Aleksa let herself slip into performance mode. It was easier than fighting another urge to snarl. "And such a curse it will be! A mighty curse to lay low the House of Domitien." She handed Leore the jar and the emerald clunked sluggishly within. "This jar must be in Kirill Domitien's hands in one hour — no more, no less — for in one hour, whoever holds the jar and emerald will be cursed."

Leore held the jar gingerly between two fingers. "How will this free my son?"

"After he gets the emerald, Domitien will contact you, I'm sure," Aleksa said. "When he does, tell him the curse will be lifted when both the emerald and your son are safe in your hands. You should also mention that if your son is harmed in any way, the curse will triple itself nine times."

Leore nodded curtly. "And what...?"

"I wasn't finished, yet, Eminence." Aleksa held out her hand. "I also require nine pieces of silver."

"What for?"

"Nothing is certain," Aleksa replied with an absolutely straight face. "In case the curse rebounds on me, I will need the silver to direct the power away, and as you so helpfully pointed out, Eminence, I have none of my own."

"So you admit to knowing magic."

Performance Maxim One: Hide the truth. "I admit nothing, Eminence."

The sorceress regarded the Fraud for a long moment, then reached into a pouch and handed her the money.

"This had better work, Fraud," Leore growled pointedly. "I sense no magic about this jar or my emerald."

"It is flowing with magic," Aleksa said, pocketing the coins. "Fraud magic. But if you don't believe me, Eminence, you are welcome to try your luck elsewhere. In fact, I would prefer it."

Leore's free hand clenched the arm of her chair. "You insolent, black-mouthed little —" Then she snapped her mouth shut and closed her eyes. A long moment passed before she opened them again. "I suppose I deserved that. I apologize, Fraud."

Aleksa blinked. *Father would never have said he was sorry.* "Accepted," she said gruffly. "Trust me, Eminence. Your son will be sleeping in his own bed within a week. That's the truth." Aleksanandra drew the hood of her cloak and headed down toward the city.

"Wait!" Leore called. "Where are you going?"

"My business, Eminence." She fingered the coins in her pocket and silently promised her growling stomach it would be satisfied in a moment. "Don't forget — see that Kirill Domitien has the jar in one hour. No more, no less."

Aleksa threaded her way quickly up the dark city streets, fighting fatigue. The good, hot meal she had bought with Leore's silver — her first real food in almost five days — was making her sleepy.

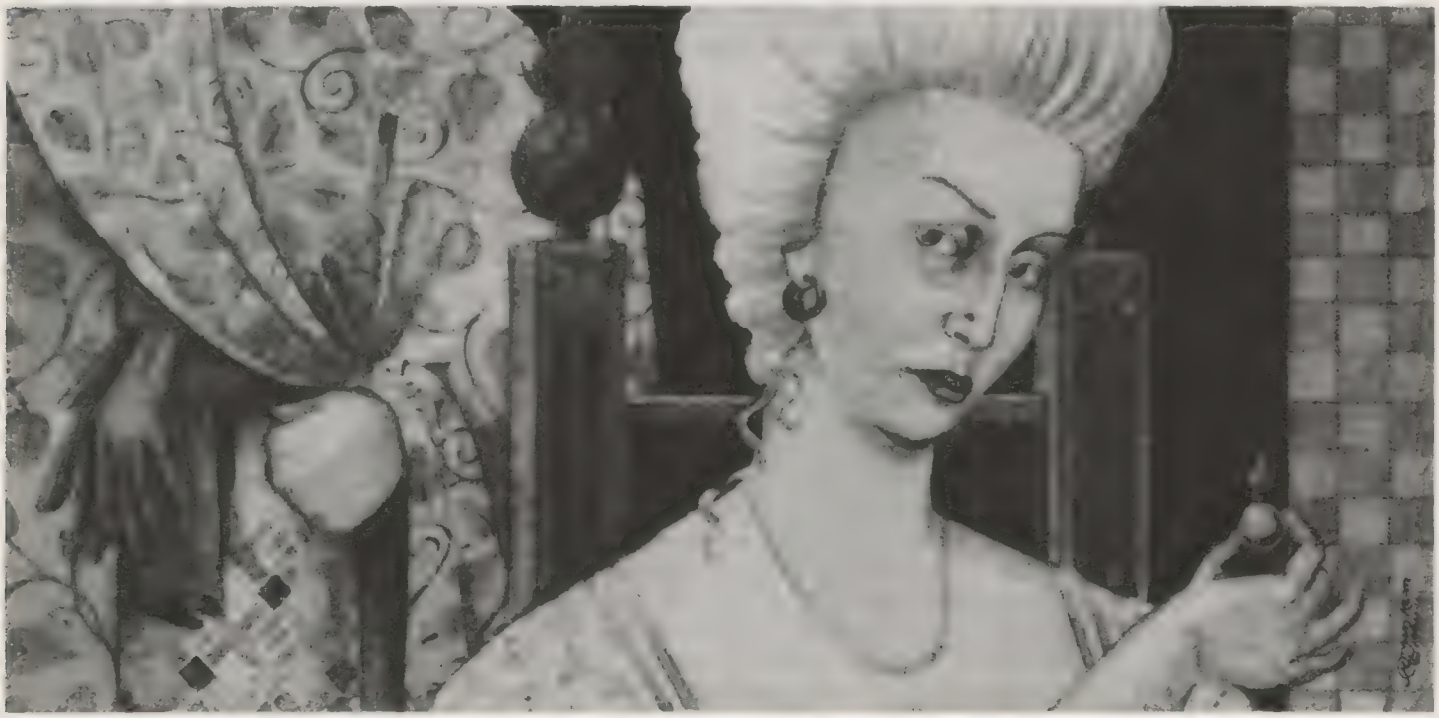
You can sleep all you like once your work is done, she told herself sternly. *The barkeep said Domitien's house is only two blocks west of the merchant quarter, and that isn't far, so keep moving.*

At this late hour few people were up and about, but she kept a hand close to her knife just in case. Tools clicked faintly against the jar in her belt pouch as Aleksa moved, so she reached inside and pulled the offending object out. The jar was full of shiny red-green leaves Aleksa had harvested with careful use of gloves and tongs in a patch of woods outside the city. The gloves she had cautiously turned inside-out as she removed them. They were currently tucked into her belt.

Aleksa wrapped the jar in her handkerchief to keep it from clinking and put it back into the pouch. Then she drew her cloak against the damp, chilly darkness and hurried down the cobblestoned street, trying not to shiver. The empty sound of her footsteps and her encounter with Leore were bringing back unpleasant memories, memories of the night she had slipped out of her father's tower in Kharshina and gone to the Frauds Guild. They had burned away her magic and taught her, among other things, some of the alchemy she craved. She hadn't heard from her father in six years.

And good riddance, she thought, and began to walk faster. *I never want to see him again and he apparently hasn't bothered to track me down. He obviously never cared enough. "Someone with your power must study magic, Aleksa. This alchemy drivel is nonsense! I know what's best. You have to trust me."* To hell with him. I —

Aleksa halted, suddenly realizing she



Artwork by Margaret Organ Kean

had reached the merchant quarter. She took a moment to get her bearings, then turned west. Two blocks later she found herself outside a sprawling three-story mansion surrounded by a high stone wall broken by a single, heavily barred gate. A slight shimmering distorted the air above the wall — the protection spell, Aleksa decided — while inside the yard, two man-sized figures marched stiffly past the front door. They followed the side of the house with a perfectly even pace and vanished around the corner.

Golem guards, Aleksa thought. *Good.*

With a quick glance up and down the street to be sure no one was watching, she scaled the gate with the agility of an escape artist and dropped lightly to the ground in the yard beyond. Hugging the shadows, she slipped closer to the house.

The moment she reached the mansion wall, the golems, armed with wicked-looking swords as tall as Aleksa, rounded the corner and headed directly for her. Rather than try to hide, however, Aleksa leaned casually against the house. The golems ignored her completely and continued on their way.

The advantage of being a Fraud, she thought wryly. *No spark of magic in me, so magical creatures can't even tell I'm there. Good for avoiding magical alarms, too. A normal person would have tripped half a dozen by now, I'm sure.* She grinned to herself. *Not something the Guild wants made public, though — it's the sort of thing that makes magicians nervous. I wonder what Father would think of it?*

The front of the house was dark and it faced south, so Aleksa followed the golems around the corner. One first-floor window glowed with a warm yellow light. Aleksa waited for the guards to move out of the way and stole close enough to peer inside. What she saw made her smile with satisfaction. A thin, hawkish man was sitting at a smooth brown table in some kind of library. Leore's emerald was in his hand and the man was staring at it with a hard line of concentration gouged between his eyes. Nearby on the table lay the jar, though the water had been poured out.

Been up all night looking for the curse, have we? Aleksa thought with amusement. *Search all you like — you're looking in the wrong place.* She wished she could have been there to see when the water ate through the protective coating and the small waterfire stone in the jar burst into blue-white flame.

Expensive stuff, but worth every bit. And Father thinks alchemy is nonsense. It certainly fooled Domitien. But now that I know you're still up, Master Sorcerer, let's see if we can find your bedroom. If you're anything like other magicians, your workroom faces south for the extra power and your bedroom faces north for the protection.

Aleksa padded around another corner to the northern side of the mansion. Though it was early autumn, lilacs scented the air and a small stream rippled merrily among perfect shrubs. An ornate balcony on the second floor trailed a beard of ivy to the ground. Aleksa snorted.

Don't expect many thieves, do you? Stupid, just like all magicians. Puts all his faith in magic and can't see that sometimes you need the mundane world. I'd never get past an alert human sentry.

Aleksa put out a hand to climb the vines, then drew back with a sharp hiss of fear. A dozen mouths full of glittering teeth gaped among the leaves.

All right, maybe he's not so stupid.

Experimentally, she poked at one of the mouths with a stick. No reaction. She tried again, this time with a lightning-fast finger. Nothing. Aleksa sighed with relief.

Bred by magic. Can't see me.

She scrambled up the ivy using the thick vines for handholds and eased quietly onto the balcony, where a pair of closed glass doors led into a darkened room. Aleksa unsuccessfully turned the knob, then reached into her tool pouch and came up with two flat bits of metal.

Usually I pick locks to get out, she mused as she worked, *not to get in.*

The door opened noiselessly and Aleksa stepped onto a thick carpet. In the dim light she could see a large canopied bed flanked by a pair of iron braziers. The letters "KD" had been carved into the headboard and inlaid with silver. Silk sheets and blankets were turned back, ready for someone to sink into the inviting softness. Two overstuffed armchairs stood in a corner and the walls were lined with bookcases. The room had an oddly leatherlike smell.

Aleksa thought about the hard bed in her chilly wagon and sighed. Then she snorted. *Regrets? All this could have been yours — if you had been Father's obedient little girl.* She ran a supple hand over the sleek bedding and came up with a flower petal. *Roses in his bed? Better and better.*

The Fraud simultaneously turned her leather gloves right side out while putting them on, then opened the jar from her pouch.

"Leaves of three, leave them be," she thought, and rubbed them liberally over the exposed sheets and pillow cases. She scattered a few leaves among the rose petals, then put the jar away and removed her gloves. *Let's see what other mischief I can get into.*

An open door took her into what seemed to be a sitting room. Thin moonlight from the window streamed over chaise longues, armchairs, and marble endtables strewn artistically about the room among valuable-looking sculptures. In the corner, a seven-foot-tall statue armed with a thick-bladed sword stood next to a set of black iron bars. Aleksa gasped when she realized it wasn't a work of art but a cage guarded by another golem. She slipped closer for a better look. The golem ignored her.

In the cage on a dirty straw tick huddled a boy with white-blond hair and angular features. He couldn't have been more than ten years old, though the resemblance to Leore was unmistakable.

Royden, Aleksa thought. *But...he's so young. Not even an adolescent. And these magicians use him as a pawn in their games?* For a moment she considered picking the lock on his cage and getting him out then and there, but eventually discarded the idea. *The golem can't see me, but it can see him. Maybe —*

The rattling of a doorknob brought a rush of fear to Aleksa's stomach. Reflexively she dove beneath the dust ruffle of a chaise longue and tried to stop breathing as Kirill Domitien entered the room, clutching Leore's emerald. A ball of orange light hovered obsequiously over his head and he was snarling under his breath.

The hawk-faced sorcerer crossed the room to the cage — the golem obligingly moved out of the way — and banged the emerald on the bars.

"Wake up, boy," he barked. "I've got news for you."

Royden stirred and sat up. He stared defiantly at Kirill but Aleksa noticed the slight quaver in his voice when he spoke.

"I'm hungry," he said. "And thirsty. My mother — "

"Your mother is a traitorous bitch,"

Kirill snapped. He brandished the emerald. "I don't know how she did it, but there's some kind of magic on this gem — it flashed just as I opened the jar it came in. She's sealed your death sentence, boy, just as soon as I figure out what she did. Sleep on that, if you can." And he stomped into the bedroom, slamming the door behind him. The orange light went out.

Royden's defiance vanished the moment the door was closed. He slumped back to straw and wrapped his hands around his knees, trying unsuccessfully to hold back tears.

A sudden sympathy flooded Aleksa. *He's just like I was — caged by an uncaring magician. There weren't any bars on my cell, but it was just as real.* She crept out from her hiding place and sidled up to the cage. The golem stared emptily at nothing.

"Hey," she whispered. "Hey, Royden — you're going to be all right."

Royden jerked his head up and looked at her with startled green eyes. "What? Who are you?"

"My name is Aleksa. Your mother hired me to get you out of here."

"You mean we're leaving?" he asked with a rising note of hope.

Aleksa shook her head. "Not yet. I couldn't get you past the golems. Now listen carefully, Royden — this is very important. If it looks like Kirill is going to...going to hurt you, tell him your mother's curse will triple itself nine times. Understand?"

"What curse?"

"I can't explain now. Just tell him, all right? And don't worry — you'll be home soon." She reached through the bars to put a reassuring hand on his shoulder and realized he was shaking. "You've been really brave. Just hold on a little longer."

She started to move away, but he gripped the bars on his cage.

"Wait! Don't leave me!"

Aleksa glanced nervously at the bedroom door. "I have to," she whispered. "It won't be long. That's the truth." And she darted out the door Kirill had entered through before he could protest further.

It was still too early for servants to be up and about, and Aleksa found her way out of the mansion without incident. She strolled past the outdoor golems with a jaunty wave and vanished over the gate.

It was late next morning and Kirill Domitien's image stared coldly across Leore's sitting room.

"If you think the curse is bad now," the sorceress was saying, "just try harming my son. If he is injured or killed, the curse will triple itself, then triple again and again until it has done so nine times."

Kirill's hawkish face turned a brighter red and Aleksa, hidden behind some curtains, noticed with satisfaction the swollen, pus-infected welts that covered his skin. He also looked like he desperately wanted to scratch someplace very private.

I'll bet he does, she smirked. *Nasty stuff, poison ivy. And I have yet to see a magician that can cure it.*

"This is impossible," Kirill spluttered. "No magic can penetrate my

Artwork by Margaret Organ Kean

Artwork by Margaret Organ Kean

barrier. None!"

"If you say so, Kirill." Leore leaned forward in her floating chair. "But I guarantee things will get steadily worse until you return my son — and the emerald. Talk to me again when you're ready to let Royden go."

Kirill snarled and raised his hand. "You — "

Leore blew at Kirill's image and it popped like a soap bubble. Then the sorceress collapsed into her chair and put her head back with a heavy sigh. A fraction of a second later, she apparently remembered she wasn't alone and straightened. The chair spun to face Aleksa, who emerged from the curtains.

"I hope you know what you're doing, Fraud," she growled. "He threatened to kill Royden."

"Don't worry, Eminence," Aleksa replied. "He won't."

"I don't even know for certain if he's alive," Leore muttered, as if to herself. "What if he's already dead?"

"No, Eminence. Royden is — "

Aleksa cut herself off. She had intended to say she had seen him, but that would reveal that she had been in the Domitien mansion, something she didn't want to explain to Leore. And something about the sorceress made Aleksa hesitate. She shot a glance at the other woman's face.

You pride yourself on being able to read body language, Fraud, she thought. *So look at her.*

Aleksa did and suddenly realized Leore's expression was hard and immobile, but it was only a mask. Her eyes were open just a little too wide and she licked her lips just a bit too often. Leore's right hand was calm and motionless, but her left clenched at the arm of her chair in a spasmodic rhythm.

She isn't angry, Aleksa thought. *She's scared almost out of her mind. Royden must mean a lot to her.* An unexpected surge of envy for the boy swept over Aleksa. *I'll bet Father didn't go through all this to find me when I disappeared.* But then another voice spoke up inside her. *And how would you know? His spells wouldn't be able to track you. If he went to the Guild, they certainly wouldn't say anything.*

An image of her father ordering (begging?) the impassive Guildmaster in Kharshina to tell him of her whereabouts popped into Aleksa's mind. She tried to dismiss it as ridiculous, but it wouldn't go.

"Royden is what?" Leore asked sharply.

"Alive, Eminence," Aleksa answered. On impulse she reached out and took Leore's thin hand in her own. "He has to be, or my curse wouldn't work. Please don't worry, Eminence. I know you're frightened, but my magic *will* free your son. That's the truth."

Leore burst into an almost hysterical laughter and snatched her hand away. "What would a Fraud know about the truth?" she mocked, and Aleksa stiffened. "I'm not frightened. I'm angry."

"Perhaps, Eminence," Aleksa replied coldly. "But when your son comes home, he'll need a feeling, understanding mother, not the woman in that chair."

Aleksa turned her back and strode out of Leore's house.

The next three days were busy ones. Aleksa moved her wagon to an inn courtyard within the city and spent the daylight hours in bed. Evenings were filled with sleight-of-hand performances that bought food for her and the mule while nights found Aleksa in the Domitien mansion wreaking further havoc. The sugar supply got tainted with salt. Vinegar found its way into the wine casks. Priceless tapestries unravelled themselves. Sculptures were found with nicks and scratches. The firewood was wet. Soap got into the beermugs. Mysteriously dull knives slipped and cut the hand of the cook, who promptly quit before the curse could strike again. Most of the other servants left with her. Aleksa, giving a street performance nearby, watched them leave and hid a smile behind her hand.

"Am I going home tonight?" Royden whispered hopefully for the fourth night in a row. The golem, as always, acted as if Aleksa didn't exist.

Aleksa handed Royden the stuffed rolls she had brought and he tore into them eagerly. "I don't know, Roy," she replied. "Maybe tomorrow."

Royden paused in his eating. "You always say that, and it hasn't happened. I don't think I believe you anymore."

"I know what's best, Royden," Aleksa told him. "You have to trust — " She stopped. *That's what Father always used to say.*

"Yeah, I'll bet." Royden bit into a roll and chewed furiously. "That's why I haven't gone home yet, right?"

Aleksa bit her lip. The boy was partly right — she hadn't expected Kirill to hold out this long. She felt a sudden urge to tell Royden that there was no curse, that it was all a trick. *Why?* she thought sharply. *So he can help or because you want someone to confide in? Performance Maxim One: Hide the truth. He doesn't need to know.*

"Just...just trust me, all right, Royden?" she pleaded. "I have to go. You'll go home soon. That's the —"

"Liar!" Royden hissed. "You're just like Kirill Domitien — always saying I'll go home, always telling me what to do, saying that you know best. You promised you'd get me out and you haven't done it. You don't care about me at all. I hate you, Aleksa!"

Aleksa froze.

"Aleksanandra, someone with your power can't go untrained. I know what's best. You have to trust me."

"You always tell me what to do," Aleksa snarled. "You always say you know best, but you're lying. You don't care about me. I hate you, Father! I hate you! That's the truth!"

Aleksa fled the mansion without a word. On her way out, she smashed a pot of oil over one of the guard golems and set it on fire.

Kirill Domitien's image looked like a scarecrow after a bad storm. His rumpled, dirty clothes hung poorly on him and his bloodshot eyes stared hauntedly from a pasty face still covered with welts. Aleksa, once again behind the curtains, did not fail to notice the soot on his hands. Golem soot.

Aleksa thought she should have felt some kind of satisfaction, but words continued echoing through her head.

You don't care about me. I hate you, Father!

Liar!

That's the truth.

What would a Fraud know about the truth?

Performance Maxim One, Aleksa thought. Hide the truth. Does that include from yourself, Fraud?

"You win, Leore," Kirill said hoarsely. "I don't know how you did it, but my servants are gone, I haven't had a decent meal in days, my wine is sour, and these damned welts won't go away. I've sent a golem to your house with Royden and the emerald. Lift your curse!"

"You've lied before, Kirill," Leore growled, and Aleksa flinched. "I'll wait until I see Royden with my own eyes."

Kirill's image pursed its swollen lips and vanished.

"You see, Eminence?" Aleksa said, emerging from the curtains. "I told you not to worry."

Leore's chair turned to her and Aleksa could see her struggle not to let the anticipation show. "I hope so, Fraud. I hope so." Then she looked away, as if gathering courage to speak further.

"I...I've been considering what you said about Royden needing a — a caring mother," she said finally. "It's not easy, you know, being both sorceress and mother, especially because my husband died when Royden was just a baby. And then there was the accident." She gestured at her motionless legs. "Magic is so demanding and there are some things you simply can't drop at a moment's notice, even for your own child. I distanced myself from Royden on purpose so he would grow up independent in case something happened to me. You've convinced me that was...a mistake. With my husband dead, he's all I have left."

Aleksa swallowed. Is this how Father felt about me? "Eminence, I —"

The door banged open and Royden burst into the room. "Mother!" He flung himself across the room and into Leore's lap. The chair bobbed beneath them. "Mother! He let me go!"

Leore's face dropped into its customary mask of immobility and she automatically started to push the boy away. Then she glanced at Aleksa. There was a brief pause as their eyes met and Leore's mask shattered into a joyful smile.

"Royden!" she exclaimed. And she held her son close.

Aleksa looked away uncomfortably and saw the golem that had guarded Royden's cage standing in the open doorway. It was holding the emerald. Aleksa took the gem from its unresisting hand and held it up.

"Eminence," she called. "Your emerald?"

"Keep it," Leore replied expansively. "It's worth more than the sum we agreed upon." She hugged Royden again. "But so is my son."

"Did *she* rescue me, Mother?" Royden asked.

"She did. Her magic got you out when mine couldn't."

Royden nodded, then looked at the Fraud. "I'm sorry about what I said, Aleksa," he told her. "Before you left, I mean. I was lying."

Aleksa closed her eyes. "That's all right, Royden. I'm sorry, too." *Would Father and I have the same conversation?* she wondered. *Maybe...maybe it's time to find out. Find out the truth.*

"What do you mean you're sorry?" Leore asked sharply. "Have you two met?"

"Fraud magic, Eminence," Aleksa replied with a wink to Royden. "Fraud magic."

Leore looked at Aleksa suspiciously, then apparently decided to let the matter rest and gave Royden another hug instead. After a moment, she noticed the golem. "What are *you* waiting for?" she said. "Go on — go home."

Not a bad piece of advice, Fraud, Aleksa mused as the golem lumbered out the door. *Not bad at all. That's the truth.* And a weight she hadn't even known she was carrying simply vanished.

Aleksa said good-bye to Leore and Royden, who thanked her almost to the point of embarrassment, then left the mansion with the emerald in her pouch and headed back to the inn to hitch up her wagon. The mule looked at her reproachfully as she put it into harness. Aleksa laughed.

"Gotten lazy these past days, have you?" she said, scratching behind its ears. "Sorry. We've got business in Kharshina." She paused thoughtfully. "I think it's time for a Fraud to uncover the truth."

❄

Steven Piziks shares a small apartment with his wife and two cats. To the list of "strange jobs held by writers" he adds writer/producer of "murder parties". He notes, "A murder party is a gathering at which someone is murdered and the guests have to find the culprit. Actors planted among the guests help facilitate things, but guests have been murderer and, occasionally, victim." He is currently going back to school to add a few more subjects to his teaching certificate (and improve his employability).

Margaret Organ-Kean studied art and art history at Boston University, Central Washington University, and University of Washington. Margaret recently completed a tour of art museums in Britain. She has been a professional illustrator since age fifteen. She lives in Seattle and works as a tech writer and systems analyst. Some of her designs have recently been included in the MAGIC game card decks.

The Kestrel's Tears

by Kimberly Egan

Jess circled in the air, watching as Luke swung the lure above his head. He cast it out as soon as he was certain he had the kestrel's attention. The hawk turned and dove again, but missed its "prey" a second time. Luke cursed as Jess pulled out of her dive. He debated on throwing the lure a third time, but decided against it. They'd had a good afternoon to this point. Jess was probably getting tired. Luke lifted his gauntleted arm, and called the kestrel in. He could swear Jess looked chagrined as he adjusted her hood, leash and jesses.

"Don't worry, Jess," Luke said to the bird. "Just because you're not hitting right now doesn't mean I'm going to turn you into kestrel soufflé."

Luke scratched Jess gently between her wings, something the kestrel seemed to like, then returned the foot-long bird to her wood traveling cage in his car. Several minutes later they started the trip home. On their way some doubts crept into his mind. Perhaps he should have let Jess try one more time at the lure before packing it in. Luke didn't think his nerves could have taken it. Neither could Jess. She was too proud to tolerate failure.

Besides, he'd been getting angry, though he was not certain at who. Not angry enough to cook the bird, he could not legally destroy the kestrel anyway, but his relationship with Jess would have suffered for it. Since his relationship with the kestrel was the only one he had with any living creature, he wanted to preserve it as long as possible.

At home, Luke settled Jess into her mew, then went inside to settle himself for the evening. The house seemed deserted to him, as it had since Caryl had left seven months before. Though his job as a computer analyst kept him busy for fifty hours a week, he had found that being alone in the house made the waking remaining hours of the week drag on interminably. He had tried bowling, golf, handball — all the socially acceptable sports for a man of his age and profession. Then he had gone to a festival and watched a falconry demonstration.

He fell in love with the birds and the sport, even putting up with the rigorous training expected of an apprentice falconer. The day he had set out the first trap for his passage bird, Luke had been filled with excitement. The day he had found Jess in his trap was the happiest since Caryl had left.

Though falconry certainly did get him out of the house, Luke still longed for companionship in the evening. About six weeks before, Luke had succumbed to the loneliness and had brought Jess into the house for company. The kestrel, who had seemed so calm and intelligent in the field, panicked and got away from him. She'd flown frantically around the living room until he'd found the presence of mind to lower the blinds and turn the lights off.

He'd never done that again, although they had established a bond of trust since then. It wasn't love, like between a dog and its master, but he'd warned by the master falconer he'd trained with never to expect that. Jess would fight him, even in small ways, to maintain her status as a wild bird of prey. Luke would always be forced to assert himself as master.

Though he couldn't have Jess in the house, it was comforting to know there was at least one other living creature there with him. He nuked his dinner and settled in front of the television set, just as he had every night since Caryl's departure, preparing to spend a fruitful evening watching reality programs and sitcoms.

Whether his frustration made him doze, or his body was reacting to yet another evening of canned laughter, Luke wasn't certain, but he found himself drifting in and out of sleep. During those in-between bits of dreamworld a falcon's cry beckoned. He let himself be drawn by it. He did not doubt it would be more entertaining than the sitcoms.

Slowly his dreamworld came into focus. To his right were the ruins of a stone keep; to his left, open fields dotted with the blackened remains of a series of some sort of small buildings. Above him wheeled the hawk he had heard scream. Luke stood transfixed by the scenery around him. His imagination had outdone itself this time. Once again Luke's attention was drawn

Artwork by Dameon Willich

upward by the scream of the hawk.

This time the bird had seen prey. Luke watched in admiration as the bird plummeted to seize the gamebird in its talons. As it dropped, Luke heard a whistled command from behind him. He was too enamored by the skill and ferocity of the bird he had seen to pay any mind to the light tread of footsteps behind him.

This was no mere passage bird, qualified to hunt only lures. This was an adult peregrine of breeding age, capable of hunting to kill. At nearly twice the kestrel's length, the peregrine could take poor Jess two out of three falls with one wing tied behind its back. It was then he realized there was a woman near the bird. Her small triangular face flaunted her defiance.

"My bird, sir. My kill." The lightly accented voice, though soft, held an angry edge. She rose from where she knelt and drew herself up to her full five feet in height. "If you wish to steal me or my dinner, I welcome you to try."

The disparity between the young woman's challenge and her tiny frame caused Luke to smile. He took one step forward as a preliminary to an introduction, but stopped when the falcon raised its wings, shrieked and snapped its beak in warning. Luke knew the bird was simply protecting its kill, but he was left with the odd feeling the reaction had something to do with the woman's words.

"I'm Luke," he said apologetically. "I just wanted you to see I wasn't going to hurt you. What's your name?"

"Jessamyn." Her posture was still stiff, though the anger was gone from her voice. Whatever she would have said next was drowned out by the shrill call of a hawk.

The cry woke him. For a moment he sat, eyes closed, awed by the reality of the dream. He had felt the breeze that had fanned Jessamyn's hair out like an auburn cloud behind her. He'd heard her footfalls, the rustle of her gray-and-russet dress, the bird's contented sounds as it fed on the insides of the freshly gutted kill. He'd even smelled the old burnt-wood scent rising from the ruins. He could even hear the sound of a hawk ruffling its feathers even now.

A querulous whistle caused Luke to

open his eyes. Repeated, it drew his attention to the top of the television set. Jess cocked her head at him, and made a sound incongruously like that of a parakeet. They stared at each other. Jess clicked her beak several times and ruffled her feathers again.

To Luke's amazement, the kestrel remained calm as he walked toward her. He offered Jess his arm, pulling his sleeve down uncomfortably low to cover his exposed wrist. She gently hopped up and sat passively as he stroked her head feathers with one finger.

"Who brought you in, Jess? And why? I know you didn't come in by yourself, it would be too dark by now."

Luke returned Jess to her mew. Despite knowing there was no way she could have gotten out herself, he inspected the structure for new holes that might have escaped his attention. There were none that he could find. Someone had let Jess out. They had either put her inside, or she had found her way there. Somehow she had stayed calm long enough to find him and settle on top of the television. He went to bed, not liking the explanation on many levels. The following day Luke built Jess a large perch for indoors, which could be carried from room to room. She adjusted to it like a parrot that had been raised in captivity. During the evening they spent their time in the living room after their exercise together, Luke watching television or reading, Jess watching him. At night, Jess accompanied him to the bedroom. Only during the day, when he was at work, was she confined to the mew. Luke didn't closely examine her sudden acceptance of him. He was just grateful that the beautiful creature liked to be near him.

It was only in his dreams that another beautiful creature came to him. For several nights he dreamed of Jessamyn. Many times Luke's dream self watched her and her falcon from a distance. Once, when her falcon brought down a kill near him, he saw her close up. She looked at him playfully, her large orange-brown eyes wide with amusement.

"Why do you follow me, Luke? Have you nothing better to do with your time?"

"I want to know you."

"But, sir, you already do." She looked at him with sad knowledge. Jessamyn picked up the peregrine's kill and ran from him as if carried by the wind. As she crested the hill, Luke half expected her to take flight and join her bird. He lost sight of her and awoke.

In the last night's dream, light rain misted around him in the half-light of dusk. A soft blanket of fog shrouded the landscape from which the keep jutted, a sharp peaked mountain range in miniature. From its midst, Luke heard the sound of a woman's sobs. He stepped through the fallen stones to find Jessamyn cradling the wounded falcon in her arms. It mangled body twisted weakly at his approach.

"They destroyed Rhys because of me." she said, not looking away from the bird. Jessamyn took gasping breaths as she fought for control. "Help him, Luke."

"How?" He was a computer analyst, not a veterinarian. Even a vet could do little for the bird. The falcon had been shot through with a crossbow bolt. Even to Luke it was obvious that it was dying.

"You must! If he dies, I must—" Her words were drowned in the mists and her sobs.

"Give the bird to me." Luke held out his jacket like a stretcher. He didn't know what he'd do. This was a dream.

He woke to Jess's cries of outrage. He opened his eyes to find a jacket on his bed, one he had never seen before his dream. It was wrapped around a soot-covered falcon. Alarmed, he called the emergency clinic the master falconer had recommended for Jess. When they arrived at the clinic, Rhys was barely breathing. The vet suggested the bird be put to sleep. There was little he could do for the falcon, but ease its suffering.

"You have to try to help it," Luke said. "I promised."

A foolhardy promise, he thought as he carried Rhys's still form back into his house. The trip was money wasted. He could see the bird was going to die, even more clearly than he had before. Exhausted, he brought the bird back to his room, where Jess billed and cooed over the falcon like a lovesick pigeon. Luke smiled, and let himself drift into sleep, the falcon cradled in one arm. In his dream it was midday now. The weather was clear and warm, in contrast to the last time he had been there.

Jessamyn waited in the meadow. They met a short way from the keep. Luke held out the falcon, wrapped again in the jacket. As Jessamyn took the bird, he dropped his arms to his sides and stood, waiting for an explanation.

"He's my brother," she said to Luke's unasked question. "We were landed gentry, of small import. A noble wanted my sister for wife. He changed Rhys, when my brother he dared defy him. When this happened." She indicated the ruins. "Unless Rhys dies a natural death, I am fated to take his place as payment for the insult. Until we are released, our souls must travel the ages in that form."

Luke thought of Jess, and understood. Somehow he was a link between Jessamyn and Jess; past and future. He was here to save Jessamyn from ending up like her brother. At that moment, Rhys began to writhe in his sister's arms. As Jessamyn lowered him to the ground, Rhys went limp. Jessamyn began to cry. In only a few breaths, her cries of "Rhys, Rhys, Rhys" became "kree-kree-kree."

Luke grabbed Jessamyn by the arm with one hand, not waiting to see what would happen. In the other he scooped up the body of the falcon. He willed himself awake. In seconds, the grass beneath them was replaced by his navy blue comforter. Jess looked on, now just a bird, no longer the repository to Jessamyn's soul. Jessamyn raised her head to look around her, then back down at her brother's body.

"We'll find Rhys," Luke promised her. "We'll restore him somehow."

"To live here?" Luke gathered from her tone that she was not impressed.

"Here, or wherever you're from, if we can get back."

She bent her head over Rhys, and nodded her agreement. He pulled her into his arms. They dozed together, searching their dreams for a ruined keep, and the sound of a falcon's cry. ❄

Kimberly Egan has previously published confessions, poetry, and some inspirational nonfiction. Like Luke, she became fascinated with falconry at the New York State Renaissance Festival, but her household companions (her husband Ed, best friend, three dogs, six cats, and a pet mouse named Buttons) did not allow for a falcon to join the family. She sings alto with the Putnam Chorale and is currently studying for a degree in social work.

Dameon Willich lives in Seattle and has been active in the Northern Lights, an artists' group based there.

Wishful Thinking

by Jill Pollock

I gazed down into the wizard's workroom in amazed disbelief. Could it be true? I leaned further into the narrow opening in the stone tower for a better look. There was skinny old Garman, wizard: robes flapping and hands waving in the air as he danced wildly around his workbench. I stifled a giggle as he hooted in exuberant laughter, kicking up scrawny ankles, hopping about like a spastic chicken.

Unbelievable. *This* was the man who had brought me here to this godsforsaken rocky island to be his apprentice? Quite a difference from the gaunt, glowering personage who had stormed into the academy several weeks ago, demanding an apprentice. No one had been more surprised than I when, examining the group of students assembled before him, he had extended a wizened finger and pointed directly at me. I, who had never even wanted to be a wizard in the first place, and was far from the best of the group.

I inched back into the shadows of my hiding place as Garman collapsed into a chair. The last thing I needed was for him to look up and see me spying on him. He sat there, gasping for breath but chuckling away happily. Why, I wondered yet again, had he insisted on having an apprentice when he would not let me within fifty paces of his workroom? A hireling from the mainland would have done as well — better, even. We were both suffering from my poorly cooked meals, though I managed the cleaning with little difficulty. That was all he'd let me do, and I had plenty of time to do it. Not once had he let me aid him in spell-casting, or even to prepare potions or powders.

It was none of my business, of course, and I did not truly dislike my new life on the island. Garman was in his workroom most of the day, which left me a great deal of time to myself. I explored the rocky coast, and, when I was more certain of his daily routine and confident of privacy, I had even taken out brushes and paints and tried my hand at some seascapes. If my elder brother hadn't run off to join the mercenaries, I could have been studying with an art master instead of an eccentric old wizard. But that was long ago, and here I was. Wizard's apprentice. But why wouldn't the man teach me anything?

It seemed that Garman's work was over. I still did not understand what sort of spell he had been working; I had arrived too late. He surveyed his worktable, let out another wheezing chortle, and picked up a plain brown bottle sitting amidst the mess he'd made. Still laughing, he unlocked a large oak cabinet and opened the doors to reveal a great many other bottles inside. He set the bottle next to its companions, gave it a loving pat, and locked up the cabinet again. He tossed the key up into the air carelessly. It vanished with a hollow *pop*. Whistling a dismal tune, he left the room.

I shook my head in puzzlement. What was the man up to? And what was my part in all of it? I scrambled from the ledge where I had been perched, and climbed quickly down the tower wall. The stones were large, and there were many footholds where the mortar had been worn away by strong sea winds over the years. Within minutes I was on the balcony of my own chamber, ready and waiting for my master's summons.

The following day when I climbed up the tower wall to spy on Garman, I managed to discover exactly what he was up to. He summoned some sort of spirit and flung a containment spell around it. He chanted a spell in a loud, singsong voice, and the spirit was compacted smaller and smaller, then channeled into the brown bottle. *Voilà* — a genie. The man was amassing a veritable army of genies. But for what purpose?

As I gazed down at the old man's dance of joy once again, my mind wandered back to my last day at the academy. The master had called me into her office to present me with my official apprentice's badge. I asked her what she knew of the man who was now to be my master, and all she said was that he'd never been a particularly powerful wizard.

"Then why did he pick *me* for his apprentice?" I'd asked.

"Perhaps because he fears a more powerful apprentice would overshadow him. Don't worry about that,

Artwork by Ann Chandellor

though," she advised me. "Just work your hardest, and you'll soon be back here for your journeyman's badge. You'd be surprised how quickly two years can pass."

Now I wondered whether they would, indeed, pass so very quickly.

When Garman placed the bottle inside the cabinet, I saw that there was not much space left inside. Perhaps when it was full he would set his mysterious scheme in motion. Then it occurred to me that maybe the man simply collected genies. There was nothing wrong with that, I supposed, but it did seem a bit cruel to keep all those genies shut up in bottles.

Garman cackled as he left the workroom, rubbing his hands together in gleeful anticipation. I very much doubted it was my cooking he was so looking forward to. No, there must be some sort of scheme behind all this. Or else why all the secrecy?

The days passed, and the large oak cabinet slowly filled up with brown bottles, each containing its own genie. Garman's little dance grew more and more ecstatic each time he completed another spell. But thinking of all the power he could wield using the genies *en masse* made it less and less amusing to my eyes.

Finally he put a cork in the last bottle.

He held the bottle high above his head and spun around triumphantly. "At last!" he cried. "Belphon, Arminda, and Knofyl! You will have no chance against magic of this caliber. And when I am through, *I* will be the only one on this peninsula and the most powerful!" He laughed and laughed, then muttered things about "no-account, hopeless wizards" and such.

The names he'd mentioned were familiar to me, especially Arminda. That was the name of the head wizard at the academy. It seemed Garman was hatching some sort of plot against the wizards there — if they were gone, he would be the most powerful wizard on the peninsula. The only wizard left, besides me. No wonder he had chosen me as his apprentice — my powers were nothing compared to his, weak though his were compared to the others'. How could I possibly hope to stop him?

He left the workroom again, whistling. I sagged against the cold stone wall in despondency. The mainland was too far away to swim to, and we had come in a magical boat of Garman's own construction. It had disappeared when we arrived, and there were no other boats on the island.

I was not able to mind-call, except at very short distances. And he would notice right away if I tried. There had to be some way I could warn them. They would never be able to withstand the power of so many genies acting together against them unless they were prepared.

All at once my eye fell on the worktable, and on the brown bottle that still sat there. He'd forgotten to put it into the cupboard! Suddenly I knew what to do. It would be my only chance.

That night when Garman had retired to his chambers, I lowered myself down into the workroom from the alcove high in the tower. It had been easy to find a rope in the basement, and easier still to conceal it in my robes and take it back up to my room. To be on the safe side, I'd constructed an illusion of myself sleeping soundly in my little cot, an image that tossed and turned, and would bear close scrutiny, though not any physical contact.

The workroom was dark and cold, and smelled of sulfur and an unidentifiable spicy scent that was not unpleasant. I spoke a prayer under my breath, lit a candle, and approached the worktable. Yes, the bottle was still there. I picked it up and started to remove the cork when a sound from the hallway outside left me frozen in terror. It was Garman!

For what seemed an eternity I stood there, motionless, with one hand on the bottle and the other on the cork. Finally I came to my senses. My only chance was to finish what I'd started. The cork came out with a loud pop, and a glowing green mist flowed out and formed itself into the shape of a very large man. The key clicked in the lock.

The genie gazed down at me from stern, glowing eyes. I panicked. What to tell it? "Please," I said in a squeaky voice, "please free the other genies and go to the academy and tell the head wizard that Garman has been plotting against them with an army of hundreds of you!"

The door was opening. With trembling hands I plucked my apprentice's badge from my robes and thrust it into the genie's hand, so the academy would know I'd sent the message.

"You idiot!" shrieked Garman from the doorway. "What have you *done*?"

My words were lost in the ensuing confusion. The genie quickly freed all the others in an enormous swirl of green smoke, and they disappeared out the window into the night. Leaving me all alone with one very angry wizard.

I backed away from him fearfully. His face was pale and menacing. He reached for me with a preternatural quickness and as his fingers closed around my neck it occurred to me that I could have also asked the genie to take me to safety. I cursed myself for an idiot as darkness threatened to overtake me. Somewhere in the background, I heard a voice chanting familiar words in a singsong voice.

Suddenly I felt very light, almost disembodied. This is what dying is like, I thought. The sensation continued and after a few moments I cautiously opened my eyes. I remember trying to scream when I looked down and saw the floor floating far below me. But no sound came out. Then I realized that I could see through my own body. The voice continued chanting, and I understood what was happening.

I tried to fight it as the wizard's magic pushed me into the mouth of the bottle, but to no avail. It was as though the bottle were sucking me inside, and I was powerless to resist. The last thing I heard was the cork squeaking its way into the bottleneck.

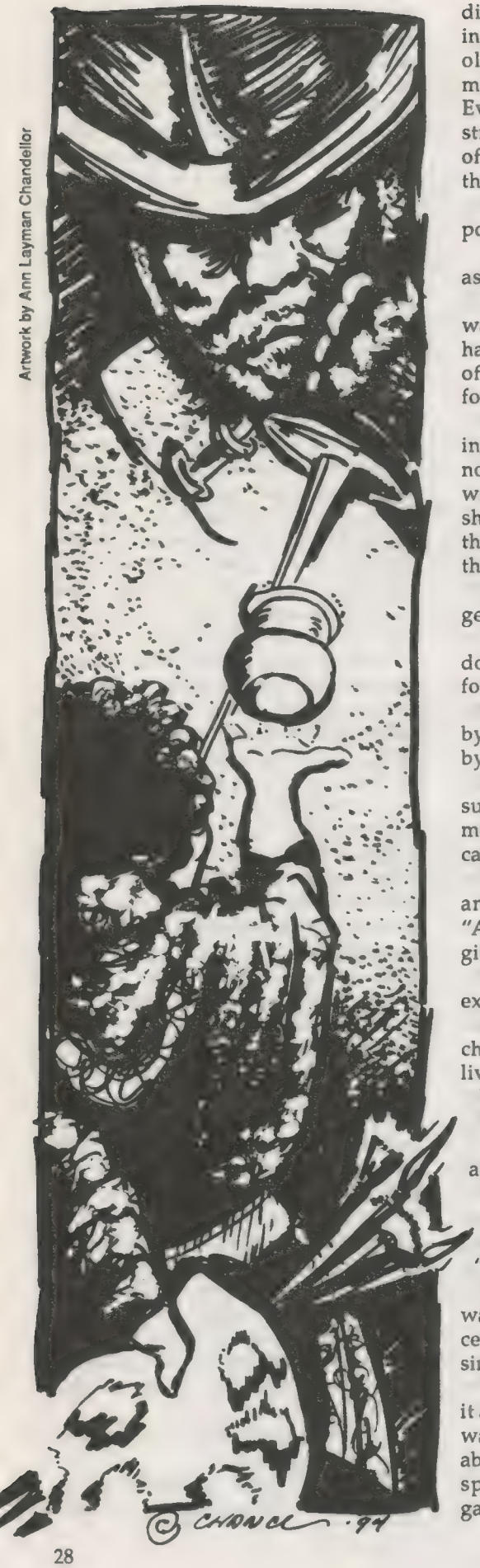
Time passes in a very strange way inside a bottle. I was conscious, and I believe I slept sometimes because I can remember dreaming. Yet I could not see out of my brown glass prison. And curiously enough, I did not care to. Time washed around me like a gentle stream, and I was content to rock peacefully in its waves, not at all caring about past, present or future. It was as if they did not exist, and as if I did not exist either.

When I heard the squeaky sound of a cork being pulled out, it took me a very long time to realize what it was, what I was, where I was, and why I was being sucked out of a very small opening and increasing dramatically in size. Memories came back to me with a rush, and sudden fear washed over me as I prepared to face my master once again.

But it was not old Garman who stood looking down at me with a very puzzled expression. I did not recognize this person at all.

"I thought genies were tall and muscular with green skin."

"They are," I said. The man who had opened my bottle appeared to be a sol-



Artwork by Ann Layman Chandellor

dier. He was tall and muscular, wearing worn leather armor and many scars, old and new. I gazed around my master's workroom in astonishment. Everything had been completely destroyed. Shelves were broken, shards of clay and glass lay strewn about on the stone floor.

"You certainly aren't," the soldier pointed out.

"What happened to the wizard?" I asked.

"He's dead," replied the soldier. "I want my three wishes now." He stared hard at me as though doubting a genie of my skin color and stature could perform wishes at all.

"Look," I said. "Thank you for opening the bottle and everything. But I'm not a genie, and I cannot give you three wishes." I turned to leave, but stopped short in my tracks when I felt something cold and sharp prick me between the shoulder blades.

"One more step and you'll be a dead genie. Give me my three wishes."

I turned to face him. "What are you doing here, anyway?" I asked, playing for time.

"Mercenary," he said shortly. "Sent by the academy. That wizard was killed by our company mage."

My heart leapt to my throat. I had succeeded! The genie had delivered my message, and the academy had taken care of old Garman.

"I stayed behind to see if they missed any spoils," continued the soldier. "And," he grinned, "they sure did. Now give me my wishes."

"Well," I began doubtfully, "what exactly do you wish for?"

He scratched his stubble-covered chin. "Well, I'd like to retire rich, and live a long life surrounded by lots of beautiful women. In fact, I'd like to live forever."

"Forever? I don't think I can manage that one."

He snorted. "Not much of a genie, are you. Little and scrawny." He waved the dagger under my nose. "Do your best."

My mind raced. Rich. Well, that wasn't too difficult. I figured the mercenaries hadn't found the hidden door since the worktable was still in place.

"Move the table," I ordered. He gave it a mighty shove to one side. The man was *strong*. I made some more gestures above the stones, and muttered a simple spell of unconcealment. The man gasped as a plain wooden door was revealed.

I motioned to him to pull on the rusty ring that served as a handle. The door opened soundlessly, revealing a long flight of dusty stairs descending into darkness. He looked at me suspiciously, then motioned me forward with the dagger.

I sighed and picked up a broken candle stub that lay on the floor. I lit it with a simple fire-starting spell and started down the steps. He followed close behind me, as if fearing I would disappear at any moment. But when we reached the bottom he quickly forgot my presence.

"Look at this!" he shouted gleefully. Indeed, it was quite a sight. Shiny coins and jewels were piled high in wooden crates that lined the walls of the hidden cellar. He snatched the candle away from me and went from box to box, examining his new-found wealth. I backed away toward the stairs as unobtrusively as I could. I padded up them but before I reached the top I felt the all-too-familiar prick of the dagger at my back.

"I'm, uh, going to take care of the next wish," I stammered.

"You aren't leaving my sight, little genie," he growled. "Now march yourself right back down there."

As he continued to sort through his treasures my mind raced. What could I do about the beautiful women? I could certainly construct illusions of beautiful women, but there wasn't a chance he wouldn't touch them. Then I'd feel more than the tip of that dagger.

When the mercenary had filled his pouch and every pocket with gold we climbed back up the stairs to the workroom. I still hadn't thought of a way to fulfill his second wish.

"Now," he grinned, revealing crooked yellow teeth, "make me immortal."

"But what about the beautiful women?"

"That'll come last. Hell, with this money I can buy all the women I want. First things first."

"Well," I said, thinking as quickly as I could, "I might not be able to make you completely immortal, but... I know a way that comes pretty close."

"Do it!" he barked.

"I'm not sure..."

He held the tip of the dagger up against my throat. I felt something wet trickle down my neck and into my robes.

"All right! This will take a few minutes." I glared at him until he slowly removed the knife from my skin. Taking a deep breath, I started to chant in a singsong voice. I'd heard the spell often enough, though I'd never actually performed it.

The soldier's eyes opened wide in surprise as he found himself floating high above me in a transparent cloud. His mouth opened but no sound came out. Now for the spell of containment. It pressed around him, drawing him into a smaller and smaller form. And now, into the bottle. He streamed into the bottle, which I quickly sealed with the cork.

That was about as immortal as a person could get — especially if no one ever opened the bottle.

One last thing. I *had* promised the man three wishes, after all. I ran up to my chamber, and sighed with relief to find my things still untouched. Grabbing a bundle, I returned to the workroom and set to work on the bottle. When I was finished, I surveyed my handiwork. I had painted three figures on the bottle, all women: a blonde, a brunette, and a redhead. What more could a man ask for?

I placed the bottle in the hidden treasure-room where, with any luck, it would remain for a good many years, if not forever.

I went back up to the workroom, spoke the words to conceal the door, and slowly pushed the worktable back in place. Taking a deep breath to calm my racing nerves, I chanted the singsong spell one last time.

This time I was prepared to voice my request to the genie, and I waited impatiently to be sent back to the academy. And who knew? The army of mercenaries could have taken months to reach the island. If I'd spent enough time in that bottle, I'd be ready for my journeyman's badge.

❄

Jill M. Pollock is from Philadelphia but has been living in Bologna, Italy for the past seven years, teaching English and doing translating. This is her first story publication. In addition to literary pursuits, her hobbies include traveling (no surprise), photography, and horseback riding.

Ann Chancellor divides her time between Minnesota and Tennessee, and has exhibited at many convention art shows. We're glad she was able to find time to accept an assignment from us.

BACK ISSUE ORDER FORM

___ Issue #1 (Summer 1988) – *Imagination and Reason* - Poul Anderson. *The Skycastle* - cover story by Bruce D. Arthurs; cover art by George Barr. *The Final Bet* - Marion Zimmer Bradley. *Final Exam* - Jennifer Roberson.

___ Issue #2 (Fall 1988) – *The Hitchhiker* - Jayge Carr. *Bone Serai* - cover story by Susan Shwartz; cover art by George Barr.

___ Issue #3 (Winter 1989) *The Adinkra Cloth* (a Nebula finalist!) - Mary C. Aldridge.

Issue #4 **SOLD OUT**

___ Issue #5 (Summer 1989) – "The Dragon Issue" *The Dragon, the Unicorn and the Teddy Bear* - Phyllis Ann Karr. Cover art by George Barr.

Issue #6 **SOLD OUT**

___ Issue #7 (Winter 1990) – *Daughter of the Oak* - David M. Shea. *The Hall of the Winter Folk* - cover story by Stephen C. Fisher.

___ Issue #8 (Spring 1990) "Science-Fiction/Fantasy" Issue *Change* - cover story by Jo Clayton; cover art by James Balkovek.

___ Issue #9 (Summer 1990) "Short-Short" Issue Forty stories, PLUS articles! Short-shorts by Lackey, MZB, Paxson, Hodges, Schweitzer, Waters, Rosen, Huebner, and a host of others!

___ Issue #10 (Fall 1990) –*Satanic, Versus...* - Mercedes Lackey. *What a Wizard Does* - Janet Kagan. *Vassilissa the Fair* - Micole Sudberg.

___ Issue #11 (Winter 1991) – *Brontharn* - cover story and cover art by George Barr. *Be It Ever So Humble* –Tanya Huff. *Footsteps* - Marion Zimmer Bradley.

___ Issue #12 (Spring 1991) – *The Connecticut Eskimo* - Madeleine L'Engle. *Sunrise* - Leslie Miller. *The Girl* - Donald Backman.

___ Issue #13 (Spring 1991) – *Haute-Clare* - cover story by eluki bes shahar; cover art by Frank Kelly Freas. *According To Custom* - G.E. Gaines.

___ Issue #14 (Fall 1991) – *Black Ribbon* - Dawn Albright; cover by Gail Butler. *The Tengu's Scroll* - Dana Kramer-Rolls. *The Wuzzles* - M. Z. Bradley.

___ Issue #15 (Winter 1991) – *Issue in honor of Fritz Leiber;* includes article by Leiber and interview. *Queen of Summer Forests* - Isabel Cole.

___ Issue #16 (Spring-Summer 1992) – *Never Look at a Gift Sword in the Horse's Mouth* - Jennifer Roberson; cover by Alan Gutierrez.

___ Issue #17 (Fall 1992) – *Pandemonium* - Sue Young Wilson; cover by George Barr. *The White Snake* - Mara Grey. *Riddle Trial* - Deborah Burros.

___ Issue #18 (Winter 1992) – *Arakney's Web* - Jo Clayton; cover by Nick Jainschigg. *The Black Tower* - Laura Underwood. *The Witch's Child* - Patricia Duffy Novak. *Queeneyes* - eluki bes shahar.

___ Issue #19 (Spring 1993) – *Dreambridge* - Janny Wurts; beautiful wrap-cover. *The Theban Fix* - Karen Anderson. *Mad Sally* - Patricia Duffy Novak.

___ Issue #20 (Summer 1993) – *Cannibal Sorcerer* - Evangeline Walton & Bruce D. Arthurs. *Maiden, Are You Warm?* - Isabel Cole. *Night Stand* - Frank Tuttle. *The Basilisk* - Lucy Cohen Schmeidler.

___ Issue #21 (Fall 1993) – *First Love, Last Love* - Tanya Huff. *Mages of Carthia* - Cynthia McQuillin. *Growing Season*- Dorothy J. Heydt.

___ Issue #22 (Winter 1993) – *Mac Evren's Dreams* - Phyllis Ann Karr; cover by Alicia Austin.

___ Issue #23 (Spring 1994) – *Killer Byte* - Mercedes Lackey; cover by Vincent Di Fate. *To Kill the Undead* - Marion Zimmer Bradley.

___ Mercedes Lackey Special: Issues 9, 10, 12, 13,19, 23: $18.00 postpaid.

FULL SETS NO LONGER AVAILABLE — SORRY!

Get these back issues while they last! Enclose $4.95 for each back issue, plus $2.50 postage *per order* (NOT per issue!).

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Please enclose check or money order in U.S. currency and make payable to Marion Zimmer Bradley. Send to P.O. Box 249, Berkeley, CA 94701.

Visa/MC Exp. Signature

HERO FOR A DAY

by Rebecca Lloyd

In the Year of Floods, in the Month of Great Rains, the gods decreed that Jillene Albright was destined to end the tyrannical reign of the Spider Queen.

Her mother, of course, was delighted.

"But, Ma, I don't *want* to be a hero!" Jillene pleaded as she dodged flying medals. Her mother had dragged out a trunk of her father's things; knightly paraphernalia was now strewn all over the loft.

Her mother paused long enough to plunk a rusty helmet onto Jillene's blonde-curled head. It promptly slid down over her eyes. "Nonsense, dear," she crooned. "You'll do fine. The Seer-Priest is *never* wrong about these things, you know."

"But I'm to start writing lessons today!"

"Plenty of time for that once you've killed the Queen," she said firmly. "As for now, the Guards have volunteered to give you *proper* lessons. Riding this afternoon, arms-practice tomorrow morning, chivalry..." she trailed off, smiling dreamily. "You're going to grow up to be *just* like your father!"

"But, Ma, Da lost his leg in the Great War and ended up being Town Marshall here in Twin Bridges until he died of boredom!"

"Yes, but he was such a *fine* knight before that..."

Jillene rolled her blue-green eyes and sighed.

An hour later she slumped out of the house to go and receive the Seer-Priest's blessing. The rain had stopped for once, so there were plenty of people around to see how ridiculous she looked. Besides the helmet, her mother had dressed her in her father's old surcoat, which had to be shortened until all that was left of the device was a blue gryphon's head and upraised claw. Beneath it her father's mailshirt was belted up into a heavy cold mass around her waist; the sleeves kept slipping down over her hands. When she saw the crowd outside, she winced and waited for the laughter to start.

The people cheered.

When Jillene finally broke free from all the embraces and back-slapping, she was late for her blessing. She ran, tripping and jangling, towards Eastbridge. Twin Bridges had been built at the crotch of a Y-shaped chasm where two forks of the Wildwater cut through the hills. Its namesakes spanned each fork at the top of the chasm, continuing the trade road which ran west from the Capitol. The Temple had been built just across Eastbridge to leave enough room for the graveyard. Jillene was careful not to look down as she crossed the hundred-foot span; she was afraid of heights.

The Temple was an impressive white-stone building with an impressive white-robed Seer-Priest. The normally serious old man grinned hugely as she arrived puffing, bruised and muddy from several tumbles. Without bothering to bring her inside, he laid bony hands on her shoulders and began the blessing. "Chosen Savior of the Hill Peoples —"

A low rumble started in the east.

Turning his head, the Seer-Priest peered down the road that led to the Capitol. Then he went as white as his robes.

"*It's the Spider Queen!*" he shrieked.

Jillene turned. Lumbering up the hill, shouldering pine trees aside as it came, was the Queen's Juggernaut, a massive, magicked-iron automaton with eight towers and eight man-wide wheels. It was coming for her, the Queen's white face glaring from the highest tower. "Eep," she said.

Apparently the Queen had Seer-Priests of her own.

Immediately the old man regained all the quickness of his youth. Before Jillene knew what was happening he had vanished, the Temple door slamming shut with her still outside. "Hey!" she cried, running up the stairs to pound on the door. His only response was to slam the bolts and doorbars into place. "Hey — let me in!"

"Go kill her!" he replied in a quavering voice.

"How am I supposed to do that?"

"You're the hero!" he said. "You figure it out!"

Jillene pounded until she heard some-

one running up behind her. She turned to see the Town Deputy — big, strong, manly, handsome, and *armed* — skid to a stop in the mud and nearly fall on his armored backside. Relief flooded her. "Oh, good! Could you help me find a place to hi—"

He pulled something from beneath his cloak and gave it to her. "Here."

It was a small scimitar-shaped knife in a runed sheath. "Sorry, Miss," he said, "'tis the only magicked weapon in town. The Queen *is* part demon, y'know." He glanced at the advancing Juggernaut, went pale, and took to his heels.

"Wait!" Jillene yelled after him. "What am I supposed to do with this?"

"Kill her, of course!" he tossed over his shoulder as he ran as fast as he could towards the town.

For a moment Jillene stood in the deserted road, magic knife in hand, watching the automaton rumble towards her. Then she did what any self-respecting nine-year-old would do.

She ran.

The helmet hit the ground, followed in a few paces by the surcoat and, with some struggling, the mailshirt. She dashed across the bridge and through the muddy Commons, dodging fleeing people as she went, ignoring their yells of "Good luck!"

She groaned inwardly as she passed her mother's house, not bothering to slow. She ran until she reached the row of whitewashed shops near Westbridge. Choosing the nearest, she pounded on the door until it opened and she fell inside against a pair of grey-trousered legs.

"Quick!" she panted without looking up. "Hide me!"

Strong hands lifted her and steadied her while she got her breath. She looked up into a woman's face — a strong, lined face framed by iron-shot black hair. Aldea, the town wizard. She looked at Jillene curiously with her strange yellow eyes. "Aren't you —"

The rumbling outside was getting steadily louder. "Yes," she cried impatiently, "yes, *yes*, I'm the Savior! Now *hide me*!"

Aldea smirked. "Not too hot for the hero business, eh?"

"No!"

"All right, I'll see what I can do." The tall woman took her arm and led her to the storeroom in the back. Pushing aside a crate of dried peas, she lifted a set of four floor tiles, revealing a dimly-lit crawl space about four feet high. "Wiggle on in," she ordered. "I keep my spellbooks down there, so there's a fresh-air spell to keep them from mildewing. You'll be fine, provided you don't make any noise."

Stammering her thanks, Jillene dropped through the hole and huddled there while Aldea replaced the tiles and crate. She drew the knife and waited, trembling, for the Juggernaut to reach Twin Bridges.

The rumbling grew closer.

And closer.

And *closer*.

The rumbling changed pitch when the Juggernaut rolled onto Eastbridge. By then Jillene's teeth were chattering with fear. *I'm doomed*, she thought. *They'll find me for certain, even here. I'll have to remember to thank Aldea for trying when they drag me out to be hanged* —

Above the rumbling came a creak, then a loud rending snapping sound. It was followed by a series of metallic crashes that grew steadily fainter. A moment later, there was a ground-shaking explosion. Then, silence.

Jillene listened frantically for some clue as to what was going on. Then she froze, hearing footsteps above her. Before she could move, the pea crate was shoved aside and the tiles lifted. She squeaked and tried to duck out of sight. Then she saw Aldea grinning down at her. She was wearing a raincloak and was breathing hard. "Queen's dead," she said cheerfully.

"Huh?" Jillene accepted the hand up and stood in the storeroom staring at her.

"She's *dead*, silly. The prophecy was right."

Jillene blinked. "I don't understand."

"The bridge gave out. The Juggernaut's at the bottom of the ravine, in flames. The Spider Queen was so eager to get at you before you could get to her that she forgot how heavy the damn thing was."

Jillene's eyes went wide. "You mean —"

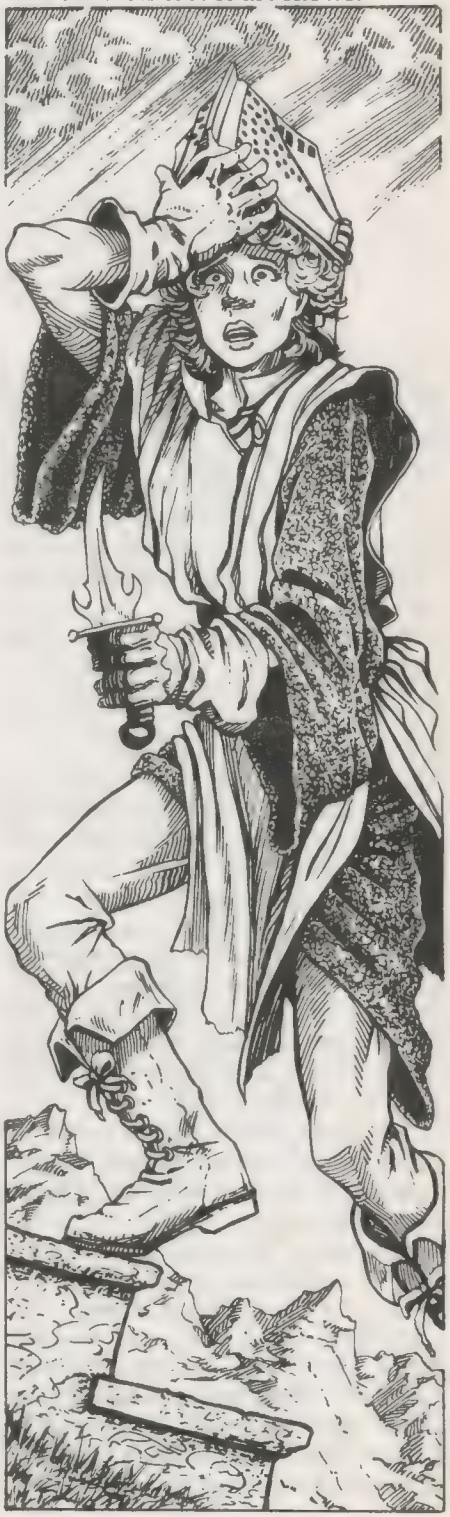
Aldea grinned wider. "Yep. Fate's fate, after all. The gods don't care *how* it comes about." She chuckled. "Congratulations, kid. You're a hero."

Outside, the Temple bells were ringing, dogs were barking, people were pouring out of their houses yelling, cheering, and singing hosannas, in spite of the rattle of rain that had started on the roof tiles. Jillene, however, heard none of it.

She was too busy laughing. ❄

Rebecca Lloyd is a native of the San Francisco Bay area and studies art at UC Berkeley. She says that the inspiration for this story struck while sorting laundry and she ended up writing it kneeling on the bathroom floor. "Fortunately," she says, "this is a rather short story."

Barb Armata is active in several artistic fields. Her depictions of "the odd, the alien, and the everyday" can be seen at Northeast sf art shows.



Artwork by Barb Armata

BRIGHT EYES

by Charles Gilman

"Whatcha doin'?" I jumped and turned around. There wasn't supposed to be anyone in the lab but me. I saw a young thin woman in a gray dress, sitting up on one of the rows of cages. She had a long face and close-cropped hair, and her eyes sparkled as they examined me curiously.

"Are you the new feeder and cage cleaner? I hope you're better than the last one. He was more interested in studying and writing his papers than he was in taking care of rats."

I was sure I had locked the door when I came in, just as Professor Beasley had instructed me. I felt for the keys in my book bag, and found them just where they were supposed to be.

"I'm Deirdre Howard," I said, expecting her to respond by telling me who she was. "This is my scholarship job."

"What makes you so lucky?" she asked, and laughed. "Handling rats can't be the most popular way on the campus to make a buck."

"What business is that of yours?" I asked. "You don't belong here. I'm not supposed to let anyone in. You'd better tell me your name."

"Ma Panya," she answered. "I come in here sometimes to see my friends. Nothin' wrong with that, is there?"

I looked toward the red security phone, wondering whether I should report her. When my eyes turned back to the cages where she had been sitting, I couldn't see her any more. I spent a lot of time looking under the cages and in the dark places behind the food cabinet, but I couldn't find her. I decided she must have a passkey and had let herself out without my noticing.

When I reported in to Professor Beasley, he asked, "Anything unusual?"

"No," I answered. I didn't tell him about Ma Panya, because I didn't want him to think I had been careless and let an unauthorized person into the lab.

When I first came to Colton College, I checked in with the financial aid office to get my scholarship, and they told me I had to see a human resources counselor first.

The counselor's name was Ms. Rafler. She was a little woman with fuzzy hair and big earrings and an expression as if she'd just eaten a lemon with vinegar poured on it.

"So you're Deirdre," she said. "Let's see what we have for you. Here's a fun one. You can be an ice-cream server. It'll be exciting."

"Okay, I get it," I said. "I don't mind working, if that's the rule. Just tell me what I have to do."

"It will help if you tell me what your interests are," Ms. Rafler said. "What kind of summer jobs did you have in high school? That ice-cream job will go fast. You'd be very popular ..."

I had always had a problem with people like Ms. Rafler, who told me what I wanted to do. "I don't need to be popular because of ice cream," I said.

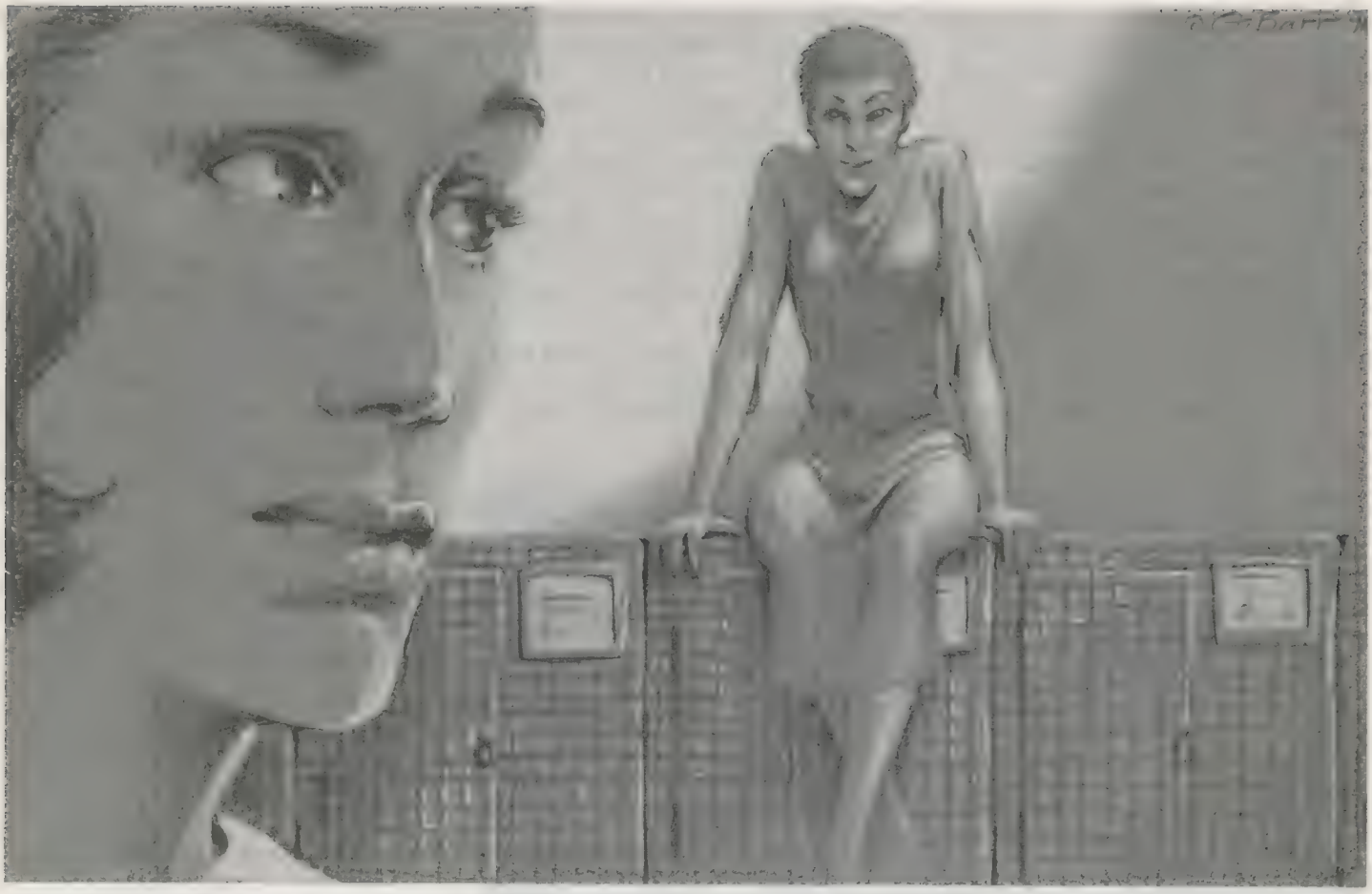
"Well, here's one as a receptionist. It requires light keyboarding ..."

"I don't know anything about keyboarding," I said quickly.

The only job I had had in high school was helping Uncle sell eggs door to door, or picking up people's old junk for him to recycle. I had lived isolated, and never done the so-called social things. Uncle and I lived on a little piece of land down by the river. It was a sort of farm, but we didn't sell animals. We had a horse that had once worked underground in a mine, and a goose with a deformed wing, so it walked a little sideways, and a dog and cat that slept curled up together under the wood stove, and lots of chickens. We allowed them to wander free in our field and eat grass, never kept them in cages.

Everything kind of came down on us my senior year. A developer wanted our land to put up a riverfront housing subdivision. Uncle wouldn't sell, so they kept trying everything they could to get us out. They said we were violating the zoning ordinances, they accused us of neglecting the animals by not using "modern" farming methods. They even accused Uncle of child neglect, for not giving me a normal environment, but I put a stop to that when I told the judge how much I had learned about the outdoors.

The developer had more money than Uncle, and more lawyers, so he was bound to win in the end. We lost our home. When the trucks came to take



Artwork by George Barr

the animals away, I tried to open the doors and let them free. I screamed at the county worker who restrained me. Uncle put his arm around my shoulder and told me to quiet down.

"We did our best," he said.

Some of the animals went to a petting zoo, or were given away to anyone who would promise not to kill them for food or harm them. Uncle was relocated into a little apartment and had to take a job as a handyman, and I didn't know what I would do.

The school counselor and social worker got together and suggested I turn my knowledge of animals to good use by studying to be a veterinarian. My grades and test scores were higher than anybody in the school, so that was how I got my scholarship. My dream was to get a place in the country where the zoning wouldn't be a problem, and make a place for Uncle to live with me. That was why I had come to Colton College. It was pretty scary, because there was no one else like me here. Now I had to tell Ms. Rafler what kind of job I would take.

"What do you really like to do, more than anything else in the world?" she asked. "The best job is the one that fits the person's interests."

"I really like to get up at five in the morning and feed the cow and the chickens." I realized I was snarling. "I don't suppose you have any jobs like that, do you?"

"Don't be too sure," she said. She frowned and looked through her files. "I think this one might do. Taking care of laboratory animals."

"What would I have to do?" I asked.

"Oh, I suppose you feed them, give them water, clean the cages. Professor Beasley will tell you when you get over there." She gave me a map, and I set out to find Professor Beasley.

He was a strange man. His face was broad and square and flat, with lower teeth that showed when he opened his mouth to speak. He wore crisply-ironed dark-blue suits and ties with diagonal stripes. I tried hard to remember everything he told me. There was a big iron door in one side of the lab.

"That's where the special experiments take place," he emphasized. "You don't have a key to that one. Authorized personnel only."

He watched me my first day, and when I made a tiny mistake like just pouring water in a drinking bottle instead of measuring the exact 500 milliliters, he came down hard on me.

"I believe in perfection," he said. "That would be a good thing for you to learn from college, wouldn't it? To replace the sloppiness of everyday life to a scientific exactness?"

All psychology for him was scientific method. My roommate Teesha told me that he had performed experiments on his own children, trying out different psychology theories. He fed one daughter from a bottle until she was three, while the other was spoon-fed from birth and never allowed to suckle.

He was always bragging about his grantsmanship. "I attract more money than anyone else around here," he told me. "I bring in hundreds of thousands of dollars, and all I get is jealousy. They should give me an award."

I didn't understand how he could be a professor and not teach any classes, but it seems Colton College was in trouble for money, and faculty were encouraged to apply for research grants that would help pay the bills. Teesha

told me that there were even some excellent teachers fired because they couldn't produce enough grant money.

When I started my lab job, I was a little perturbed by the cages and lack of petting, but I decided to make the best of it. There had been big rats in our chicken house back home, and I had always been afraid of them. The lab rats were smoother, whiter, less aggressive. I particularly befriended a white rat I called Alice. She learned to recognize me, and I frequently took her out to pet her.

Ma Panya often appeared while I was at work in the lab, always unannounced. I warmed up to her immediately. Her gray dress was some filmy cloth and it clung to her — hardly a fashionable thing to be wearing to Colton College. She seemed a lot like I had been back home. I thought she was a foreign student — her skin was dark — almost colorless — her eyes were bright and black, and I could hardly see the irises. She had a faint accent, but her diction and words were precise.

"What's your major?" I asked her.

"I don't waste time with school. I work where I'm needed," she answered.

Artwork by George Barr

"Sort of odd jobs?"

"Why do you people worry so much about what jobs everyone does?" she snapped. "As if that were who you truly are?"

"Well, I don't know about you," I said, "but if I don't clean out these cages, I'm going to lose my scholarship, and then it's back to Upper Corners for Deirdre. I don't want to spend the rest of my life mopping the floor at the Bluebird Cafe."

"Okay then, clean your cages, if you feel that way," she said. When I looked up she was gone, as always, without my seeing how she had gotten out.

Sometimes she followed me around while I did my chores. There was an area in the back where they kept the monkeys. Half the cages had baby monkeys in their mothers' arms. The other half had a second set of babies raised alone, sad little things that cowered back in the corner and shivered. "Isolation Area! Do Not Disturb!" a sign said.

"They don't get any affection," Ma Panya said. "What if we just took them out and petted them?"

"Can't," I said. "That's the rules."

"But they're so lonely. It's unnatural to deprive them of stroking."

I opened a cage. Before I could stop her, Ma reached in and took the monkey baby out. It reached up and put its arms around her neck and hugged her.

"Hey!" I grabbed the monkey to put it back in its cage. Just then Professor Beasley walked in. Ma Panya blended back into the shadows, so all he could see was me handling a monkey that was supposed to be strictly isolated from any physical contact.

"Just what do you think you're doing?" he barked.

"It just got out while I was changing the cage, so I had to get it back in," I lied. I couldn't tell him about Ma Panya, because she wasn't supposed to be in the lab at all. Besides, she must have slipped out while Professor Beasley was scolding me, because I couldn't see her anywhere.

"I'm going to send a complete description of all these incidents to the work-study office," he said. "If you make one more mistake, I'll see that you're never allowed to work with animals on this campus again."

"No more mistakes," I promised.

Most of my classes made sense. I needed to study chemistry so I would

be able to prescribe drugs for the sick pigs and chickens after I graduated and became a veterinarian, and zoology so I would know what their bones and tissues were like, and math so I could calculate the doses, and computer science so I could run the scanners and diagnostic machines. The only thing I hadn't wanted to take was something called the humanities requirement. By the time I figured out where to go on registration day, and got through the long lines, the only class that didn't conflict with my job and my other requirements was Mythology.

"If it's a myth, that means it's not true," I complained. "Why do I have to take a whole class about some stuff that people made up a long time ago, and nobody believes in any more?"

"You'll have to discuss that with your adviser," the student worker who gave out the course cards told me. "That's all I have left, unless you'd rather try Intro to Personal Communication."

So I took Mythology. I didn't want to see the adviser again. I like to make my own decisions.

Mythology was taught by Dr. Malvina Blue. She was about forty, and a little heavy, with thick graying hair down over her shoulders. It seemed so far from our world, all these big male gods with their muscles and thunderbolts. What did I care about that?

My roommate Teesha was my exact opposite. Her head was all full of magic spells, witchcraft, and faeries, and she was trying to decide whether she would major in folklore or comparative religions. She was looking through my books and found a description of a way to invoke the Black Goddess Tara by burning petals from various kinds of flowers and saying prayers while beating a little gong.

"Hey! We can get all this stuff," she said. "Why don't we try it?"

"You think things exist because people believe in them?" I asked, incredulous.

"Why do you think they exist?" she asked.

"They just do," I said. "They're all around us. We can see them."

"Anyway, let's do the invocation," she said. "It'll be a lot of fun."

She swiped some flowers from the dining room, and got a gong from a percussion student, and made me take off all my clothes and wrap a sheet around myself, so I would look like her idea of a Hindu priestess. She lit candles and turned off all the lights and started burning the flowers. It made an awful stink in our room. She started saying the prayer from my Mythology book in a high eerie voice. Just as she reached the end, there was a huge thunderclap, and we both jumped. Then we fell together, laughing.

"It doesn't mean anything," I insisted. "It was just a coincidence. The weather bureau said it would rain tonight, so how could it come from your ceremony?"

"That's what I like about you," Teesha said. "You have such wonderful faith. You can't accept that what they taught you in your science classes is a made-up reality, just like all the others."

Semester exams were coming up, and the whole campus went dead. I started having bad dreams. Somehow my job got mixed up with my Mythology class, and I imagined Teesha and I had really made the Black Goddess appear, and she was raking over the whole campus with fire, while Uncle screamed at me from the background. It was terrifying, and I was afraid to go back to sleep, though I was exhausted from everything I had to do.

I was balancing so many different things, I was afraid I'd lose control of one of them, and the whole heap would come tumbling down. All I could do was try harder and harder, even though I long since thought I had used up my reserves of strength. My exams, my courses, my job, Professor Beasley. There was so much pressure, but I just stayed up later and got tireder, and hoped it would all work out. After all, millions of students get through their freshman semester. Why not me?

I kept having trouble in the Mythology class. It was easy enough to memorize that Hera was Zeus's wife, and Saturn devoured his children, and all the little memory stuff for the quizzes, but we were also supposed to write a paper, and I just couldn't find anything that interested me. Two weeks before the end, we were all supposed to stand up and say what we had decided. When it was my turn, I had that old awful feeling that everyone was going to laugh at me. I looked at the dumb title I had written down, and it didn't make sense.

"There are so many real problems going on in the world, it's hard for me to concentrate on writing about something that never existed, and never could," I burst out.

Dr. Blue looked perturbed. "That's certainly a valid point of view," she said. "How many others agree with Deirdre?"

There were quite a number of hands. I felt ashamed. All I was trying to do was obey all the rules, and it seemed like I was inadvertently starting some kind of rebellion.

"Come see me in my office about your paper subject," Dr. Blue said.

I went to see her with a premonition of doom. Her office was untidy, with books and papers everywhere on the shelves, on her desk, and even all over the floor. She invited me in and had me sit down.

"What was your original subject going to be?" she asked.

"What Penelope wove while Ulysses was wandering." It sounded stupid as I said it.

"The spider-wife," she said.

"What?" I sat up straight. "I read the whole story, and there was no spider in it."

"Weaving her tapestry, as a spider weaves her web," Dr. Blue said. "There are lots of ways to read. Everything isn't on the printed page."

"That's the trouble," I said. "This mythology just seems to be made up as we go along. What's the point of studying something that doesn't stay put?"

"Some humanities students don't like to take their math or science courses," she said. "I try to show them they need to know more than just one thing."

"Just tell me what to write and I'll do it," I said. "I'll do anything I have to, to get the requirement out of the way."

"What if you wrote about what isn't made up in the myths?" Dr. Blue suggested. "If you're interested in facts, why don't you look at them?"

"What do you mean?" I asked.

She sighed. "I can see this isn't going to work. Why don't you just write five to ten pages clearly telling what you object to about the class. If it's well organized and uses examples from the reading, I'll accept it as a personal statement. When I was in college, some teachers helped me along a little through the tough places, and I just want to pass the favor along. Remember. Your first semester is the hardest. Everything will be easier in a few weeks."

I hoped she was right.

I trudged off among the bare late autumn trees to the lab for my work, my mind occupied with the paper. I unlocked the door and turned on the lights. I went over to Alice's cage to take her out and pet her, but the cage was empty. There were no rats in any of the cages in her row. The little feeders and water bottles were half-empty, as though the animals had been removed suddenly, in the middle of their normal activities.

I rummaged around in the drawer of Professor Beasley's desk. I knew there was a ring of keys there. One key opened the heavy steel file cabinet next to the locked door, and I began looking through the folders. Each one dealt with a different research grant or experiment. My heart pounded as I read the titles.

"Possible Military use of Animal Retroviruses." What was that doing here? That wasn't a psychological subject at all. The sum of the grant was over two hundred thousand dollars. "Activated Pleasure Centers as a Means of Social Control." The drawings showed animals with metal probes sunk deep into their brains, and electrical wires connecting them to control devices.

"Differential Treatments on Induced Burns in Nude Mice." "Effect of Genetic Alteration on Drug Susceptibility." I leafed through that one. A sentence in bold print caught my eye: "In view of the public controversy surrounding this research, absolute confidentiality will be essential."

I suddenly understood how Professor Beasley was able to get so much more grant money than the other faculty, and why the special room was always kept locked. These were experiments that violated the ethics guidelines, and companies or agencies were willing to pay very highly to have them kept secret. He was bringing in so much money, Colton College could afford to look the other way. I realized poor Alice must be in the secret room.

At the back of the file drawer there was a ring with a single key. I turned it in the locked door, and it worked. An alarm began flashing as I swung the door open, but I ignored it and walked in.

I saw the cages with the missing white rats. Alice had a big metal probe soldered into her skull. A machine would give her a shock in her brain, and she would be robbed of all volition to do her normal activities, because her pleasure centers were being stimulated. Some happiness! In another section, the nude mice were deliberately burned, then subjected to different kinds of salves or treatments to see what healed them best. There was a big heavy-duty blender that could reduce a whole mouse to liquid, so they could analyze all the chemicals in its system.

Artwork by George Barr

I opened Alice's cage and took her out, but she was totally tranquilized by her wires and paid no attention to me. I started to undo the wires, when Professor Beasley walked in. The alarm from the door must have gone off in his office.

"Doing a little detective work, are you?" he shouted. "Or were you just snooping?" He grabbed Alice out of my hand, and as he pulled her away, some of the wires jerked out of her hookup.

"I suppose you think I'm cruel," he said. "That's just freshman naïveté. I like the animals as much as you do, see?" He started to stroke and caress Alice. He must have squeezed too hard, because she bit him in the thumb.

He roared and threw Alice across the

room. I found myself repeating some strange words in a rhythmic voice, maybe something I had subconsciously absorbed from my reading. It was in a language I didn't know, yet understood as the incantation formed itself in my speech tract. Thunder boomed near the building, though the skies had been clear all week.

The room shuddered. I saw a shape over in the corner where Alice had fallen, and for a moment I thought she had grown bigger. But it was only Ma Panya.

"What are you doing here?" Professor Beasley shouted at her. "This work is confidential. No one is allowed in here." He grabbed her shoulder and began pulling her violently toward the door.

"Leave her alone!" I shouted.

He swung his free arm toward me and knocked me off my feet.

I jumped up to defend myself, but I stopped in astonishment when I saw what was happening to Ma Panya.

She had swelled up and grown tall, until she was enormous, bigger than anything alive could be. The human skulls strung around her neck were like so many pop-it beads. She somehow extended right through the walls and ceilings and still remained entirely inside the room.

She strode through the lab, bending to open the cages. The animals rushed out, and all the released rodents gathered at her feet as if worshipping or awaiting orders: the rats in front, then the guinea pigs, lemmings, and hamsters, with the myriad white mice and nude mice behind as infantry. Behind the ranks of rodents, the snakes began to crawl up. They seemed to have joined up out of solidarity with the rats.

Ma Panya grabbed Professor Beasley's tie and used it to pull him up toward her. His eyes started to bug out. The animals released from the cages went for him. A big dog got him first, then the rats nipped him. Ma Panya threw him on the floor, and a herd of rats, mice and snakes crawled all over his prostrate form. After all he had done to the animals, they wouldn't rest till they had finished him off. Ma stood over him with a big electric drill she had ripped from the tool cabinet, the wire looping back from it to the socket in the wall. "How'd you like to have a hole drilled in your skull for little wires?" she asked. "Maybe we can make you deliriously happy, the way you make the rats feel."

Professor Beasley didn't answer. He was screaming as he tried to brush the animals from his body.

"Don't hurt him, Ma!" I shrieked.

She looked ironically down at me. "Species solidarity!" she said. "Or maybe you're so soft-hearted, you'd protect anybody, no matter what he's done."

I grabbed Professor Beasley's foot and started to drag him toward the door, chasing away all the creatures that were infesting him. Some of them fled outside; others sought refuge in the nooks and crannies of the lab. Ma Panya took a step toward me, and for a moment I thought she was going to try to pull Professor Beasley back away from me, but she shivered, then shrank back to her normal human size. "You're a good kid, Deirdre," she said. She gave me a hug and a big kiss on the cheek, then kept shrinking until she was the same size as the other small creatures, and scurried with them out the door.

Once she was gone, the animals that had been nipping at Professor Beasley left us alone. I made sure he was okay, then I went over and coaxed Alice out from under a metal cabinet. I disconnected the wires from her electrode. She seemed to recognize me, and snuggled into the palm of my hand while I stroked her white fur.

Prof. Beasley rushed to the emergency room to make sure he didn't have rabies or tetanus or something. I wasn't worried. All the commotion didn't seem to have produced any physical bites or cuts on his body at all. I put Alice in my pocket, called campus security, and ran.

I was sure I would be blamed for the catastrophe at the lab. After all, I was in charge. I thought I would be accused of opening the cages, even though it was Professor Beasley himself who had caused most of the trouble. It turned out not to be a problem. Beasley lied. He said he had accidentally released the animals himself. Maybe he was afraid the research abuses would be revealed, but I don't think so. Every time he sees me a look of terror flashes on his face and he turns away.

The newspapers said a big electrical surge caused by a lightning storm had damaged the lab. It's called cognitive dissonance theory — if your experience doesn't fit your preconceptions, you change your memory of the experience, in order to keep the preconceptions intact. I've decided that there are probably just as many miracles and goddess incidents now as there were in the Greek times, but we don't hear about it because people always report it as something else more consistent with their scientific rationalism.

My term paper for Mythology almost seemed to write itself. I called it "If we had Goddesses ..." I just wrote down all the impossible things I heard the other women in the dorms or dining hall say they wished would happen to them, like winning a million dollars in the lottery, or dating some movie star, or having some big ranch out west, with thousands of acres of land. My conclusion was that they were making up myths just as much as the Greeks and Romans ever did, only they clothed them in materialism to avoid admitting they were superstitious. I got an "A" for the paper.

"It's a very good piece of writing," Dr. Blue said when she handed it back. "It took you a while, but you really understand what the class is all about."

I'm thinking of signing up for her advanced class next term, because I still have a humanities requirement left.

I got a different job, tutoring new students in the biology department. It feels good to be the one who has something to show them, instead of always thinking I'm the one who needs the help.

Uncle paid me a surprise visit at Colton College. I was so glad to see him. I thought he would be depressed, but he said he was enjoying his new life and looking forward to having me come back at Christmas vacation. I introduced him to Dr. Blue. They got along great, and the three of us went walking together across the campus. I looked down and was startled to see bright eyes peeping at me from under the leaves. I have a feeling I'm going to see Ma Panya again soon, but I don't know where.

❄

Charles Gilman is 52 and runs a social science consulting business with his wife. He has degrees in English and Linguistics, and has taught these subjects in Africa and in the U.S. This is his first fantasy sale.

George Barr has been a professional artist since 1960. He has won a Hugo as Best Fan Artist and will be this year's Artist Guest of Honor at Worldcon, Conadian in Winnipeg.

Marion Zimmer Bradley Talks to Writers: My Very Own Slush Pile

I think that the reason I have succeeded as far as I have with this magazine is an undiminished enthusiasm for the slush pile.

There's a proverbial wisdom which says 95% of the slush — the unsolicited manuscripts that come in every day — is not only bad but "Hideously, terribly, disgracefully bad," so that reading it is a painful chore to be put over on the lowest paid flunkey in the place. I was really very surprised at the number of editors who don't share my enthusiasm for the slush. Some editors regard it as, at best, a painful necessity. Or even going so far as to say they would rather make only the final decisions — from the presorted best of their manuscripts.

Well, I don't share that viewpoint. I feel a little as Herman Melville said — certainly facetiously — that whaling seamen actually went to sea to get their whale-oil fresh where it grew. I feel that's one of the major privileges of being an editor: I get first crack at the slush pile. I get to read — or at least see — the fresh new manuscripts. And, all too rarely, I make a terrific discovery. For me, there's no high like it. It is right up there with discovering a new mystery writer, or inventing a new flavor of ice-cream.

I think Don Wollheim — who was my idea of what an editor should be, and who gave me my first taste of editing — never lost his sense of wonder about finding a fresh new voice therein. I remember the first time I got my hands on a slush pile at the old Ace books, long before DAW was created. At the last minute I got cold feet, asking Don, "But what if I miss something good?" I now understand the world-weary voice in which he sighed, "You won't, Marion. Believe me, you won't!" I now know it wasn't just a compliment; he was saying that the general level was so low that no one with a fourth grade education could possibly miss anything with even half a grain of talent.

That first Ace slushpile was something. (I wouldn't like to say what — I don't use that kind of language in public.) Kiddie stories, nurse novels, sea stories — all on the science fiction desk, that is. And hand-drawn comics — I get those, too. Where do they all come from? Well, I found my real vocation that day. I love writing, and would still do it for my own pleasure if I'd never published anything. But I like editing even more, and it was for that reason that, when I could choose what I wanted to do, I got my very own magazine and, better yet, my own slush pile.

One of my major pleasures is to follow a new writer from his first talented but unpublishable fragment to the first really publishable story. Or to discover a new writer, regardless of age, who speaks in a fresh natural voice. I could cite both Stephanie Shaver and Lawrence Shimel — very talented newcomers. I had the pleasure of printing in my anthologies the first stories of Mercedes Lackey, Jennifer Roberson, Elizabeth Waters, Diana Paxson, Vera Nazarian, and too many others to name here.

There is one thing that annoys me. I'll get a manuscript from some talentless blob, whose story makes no sense, with characters of purest pasteboard. I'll send him a noncommittal rejection slip, saying something like "Dialogue not believable" or — which really gets my goat — "Doesn't fit guidelines."

Now, in the best of all possible worlds, about three months later I'd get a new story in the mail from this guy, ideally with better spelling, grammar, and dialogue, more interesting characters, et cetera. All too often the response is that they either send me something equally long, with the same faults of spelling and grammar, or else they behave like the little grasshopper in the children's story about the grasshopper and the crickets. He walked out on his high horse and was never heard from again. I get a vague impression that at least half of my first-time authors are one-timers; I reject their first submission and never receive a second.

I know I ought to say "Good riddance", but I can't help regretting that they didn't keep trying, because writing is the most fascinating game in the world. So don't be discouraged. If at first you don't succeed, as they say. If you were trying to play Olympic quality tennis, (or gymnastics, or skating) you wouldn't expect to be chosen for the Olympic team on your first tryout — and you wouldn't quit with your first defeat.

Or maybe you would. In which case, good riddance, and if you want a hobby, take up crocheting. Or collect Cabbage Patch dolls, or teddy bears who will never criticize you.

But if you are serious about this business of writing, learn to SPELL, learn to TYPE, learn English grammar, and proofread your stories carefully. And if you get a rejection, study the guidelines and try again. And again.

Writing is a funny business. A writer must be very sensitive in order to write at all. At the same time, he or she must develop something like rhinoceros hide. Because the first experience of every writer, almost without exception is rejection. Yes, me too. And also Rudyard Kipling, Somerset Maugham, and most of your favorite fantasy authors.

But if you can't stand the heat — what are you doing in the kitchen?

— Marion Zimmer Bradley

Letters to the Editor

MORE FROM McQUILLIN?

Matthew A. Frassica, Hacienda Heights, CA

I was impressed with Cynthia McQuillin's "Mages of Carthia". In the biography of Ms. McQuillin at the end of her story it mentions that she has returned to fantasy writing after 10 years. I am interested in reading anything else she has done in this genre. Her grasp of the fantasy field is new and refreshing.

I believe that Cynthia had a story or two in the early Friends of Darkover anthologies. — HRJ

SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL FAMILY FANTASY MAGAZINE

Douglas J. Kolacki, San Diego, CA

It's great to see a fantastic-fiction magazine that's "family oriented". I think that there's a lot more appreciation for such a thing out there than one might think. You're not "with it" if you don't like libido-oriented fiction? You're stuck in the Middle Ages? A prude? Whatever? I don't buy it. The stories you print are sharp, clean, short on dirt and long on imagination. Keep up the good work.

SPIN-OFFS?

Richard D. Kearney, Huntsville AL

The price I paid for issue 22 was more than made up for by any one of the following two stories: "Mad Evren's Dreams" by Phyllis Ann Karr or "The Demon's Lamentation" by Laura J. Underwood. In both cases, I wanted to know more of the characters (I think a book is in order).

With the three Anwyn stories that Laura has had published here (and another in the near future) she certainly has a good start on a book if she wants to. — HRJ

A LONG WAY TO GO FOR A MAGAZINE

Marie Louise Brodnax, Cruz Bay, Virgin Islands

I would like to say how much I have been enjoying your magazine. I first encountered *FANTASY* at Confrancisco last year, subsequently taking out a subscription and buying some of the back issues. I am learning a great deal about the craft of writing, both from the stories and from the excellent interviews.

Another facet of *FANTASY* that I find very helpful is the "Regular Features" section, particularly "MZB Talks to Writers" and "Writers Talk Back". I would also like as a modest collector of fantasy art to say that "Thank you" for the art work. The covers are — well — FANTASTIC!

Thank you for the compliments. Marion always enjoys both encouraging and hectoring new writers, hoping to urge them to do their best. I enjoy selecting commissioning the artwork for stories. However, we have twice now had stories written to match beautiful artwork, for issue #19 and now for this issue, and we may continue this trend since convention sales and other direct sales of magazines are so dependent on good covers. — REH

DIALOGUE: THE DEMONSTRATION

Greg Koster, Bremerton, WA

I'm sure you didn't plan it this way, but the story, "A Matter of Choice" was a fine illustration of Ms. Bradley's/Mr. Godwin's discussions of dialogue. At first, I was astonished that this could be Ms. Dunn's first sale. Her skill with dialogue is rare. She is able to distinguish characters by the way they speak and use what they say to advance the story. It would be difficult to refine the dialogue farther. But the great skill with the dialogue obscures the weak construction. A story is more than its dialogue, construction, plot, characters, or theme. All these must interact to produce a story. All must subordinate themselves to the total effect. Ms. Dunn's dialogue is far superior to the other tools in her armamentarium. It can camouflage their weaknesses. But in the tight confines of a short story, camouflage is ultimately self-defeating. Or so I think. I hope Ms. Dunn writes a lot more stories for you.

It's hard to find a perfect story. Marion and I both thought this one was quite entertaining, so we printed it, and hoped that reader would enjoy it. — REH

ANOTHER VOTE FOR STYLISTIC STANDARDS

Shirley G. Ford, Stockton, CA

I am responding to your comments about English fluency expressed in [one of the Darkover anthologies]. I think you might consider adding stories from California natives to your list of automatic rejects. As a resident, by transplant, of California I am horrified by what passes for acceptable prose. I fight the good fight for standard English in the classroom when I can. The vocabulary and literacy of the California student has shrunk and threatens to implode. Creative craftsmanship cannot survive linguistic poverty. We teachers serve the needs of the native user poorly when we try to be all things to all students in the overcrowded potpourri of our California classrooms. You have provided ammunition from a professional to add to our arsenal. Thank you for the silver bullets. Perhaps we may yet avert the tsunami of illiterate prose from our best and brightest before it overwhelms us. ❄

Interview with Katherine Kurtz

by Rachel E. Holmen

In late June 1994, I interviewed Katherine Kurtz by phone at her home in Ireland. Katherine has had a glamorous life, it would seem: she's happily married, raising a stepson, has owned her own horse, and currently lives in what many of us would call a castle. But it's taken a lot of hard work and planning to get there, as I found out during our call.

Normally, I'd start by describing your office, but since we're on the phone, can you describe it for me?

Actually, I'm sitting in my kitchen right now! Hollybrooke is a Gothic revival house, built in 1832 to '37; it looks a lot like Toad Hall. Fans will get a chance to actually see it on television in November, because we just were used as one of the principal locations for *Scarlet*, the sequel to "Gone with the Wind". Hollybrooke is doubling for Valley Hara, the ancestral O'Hara home in Ireland. *SCARLET* picks up at Melody's funeral, right after the end of *GONE WITH THE WIND*, and carries on with Scarlet's adventures in Atlanta and Charleston. Then she goes back to Ireland with a cousin who's a priest, buys back the family home and the village that goes with it, and restores them. So they used our house as Valley Hara, and they trashed it for when she first comes here, when the house is derelict. Supposedly it has been boarded up for thirty years.

The film crew asked, "Would you mind if we repainted the great hall?"

Last fall, when they first started talking to us about using the house and were negotiating the contract, they said, "Now, don't do anything to the gardens all through the winter, until after we've shot the film, because when she first comes, we want the gardens to look all hairy and awful." Well, let me tell you, they *did*. We said, "Oh, you mean we can't pull weeds? We can't whack the ivy and brambles? Shucks, we had our weekends planned for...months!"

They wrapped [the film] last week. The preparation and shooting took about six weeks, and not much else got done during that time. The garden is being put back to proper now. In fact, the gardeners were just out today. They cut the grass, and they weed-whacked down in the lower garden which was knee-high, and they're going to come back tomorrow and rake, and they also trimmed the hedge in the back which had just exploded because of course this is June, and stuff has been growing since the end of March. Anyway, it's going to be glorious-looking when they get it all cleaned up.

Inside, they trashed the drawing room and the great hall. For instance, in the drawing room they stripped off all the wallpaper and dirtied up the walls and made it look like the roof had been leaking and water had been running down the walls, and there were patches of dry rot and wet rot and mold. When they first started putting up the dry-rot patches, Scott, my husband, walked into the room and said, "I *knew* that it was fake, intellectually" (he's worked in the film industry for years), "but for just a second there, I had heart failure. It looked *so* real!"

They did the same thing in the great hall. One of the first things they asked when they decided they wanted to use the house was, "Would you mind if we repainted the great hall?" Well, this has been on our list of things to do since we bought the house seven years ago, so would we *mind*? No. We thought, "What color did you have in mind?" So it has gone from being a very dull, dingy dark red to a nice, light sort of a golden, almost a caramel color, and they picked out the arches with a lighter color which will get even lighter, because the deal was, if we didn't like anything they did with the house, they'd have to change it when they were done, to something we did like. So there's going to be some tidying of stuff like that, and they've got to replace some carpets and refinish some floors. This is standard stuff that happens when a movie moves in.

If your house were all perfect and beautiful and the way you wanted it, you wouldn't even *think* about letting a film crew come in and use it, because you'd be having heart failure the entire time. But if your house needs work anyway, it's the perfect opportunity because they're going to do good things for it, and if you don't like it, they have to change it back to something you do like when they're done. You also get a chance to see what your house looks like with a style that might not be something that you'd think about ordinarily. For instance, in the library, which they didn't do any distressing to, they just redressed it — they took all our furniture out, and they brought in their own. They had something like a quarter of a million pounds worth of antique furniture and crystal. They dressed it as a proper Victorian lady's sitting room, and it was full of beautiful oak furniture and lace and crystal and silver and lovely old oil lamps and flowers — just absolutely gorgeous. In fact, the set dresser won an Oscar for "Out of Africa", and this was the caliber of the people who were working on it. The art director

did the art direction for "Room with a View". We're not talking about flyweights on this. It's an 8-hour miniseries, and it will start on Nov. 13, a Sunday night. Joann Whaley Kilmer played Scarlet, and while she is not the same kind of beauty as Vivien Leigh, she made a very good Scarlet; she's a very good actress, very quick study, and Timothy Dalton made a *wonderful* Rhett Butler, really handsome and dashing. They changed the book considerably. I think it's going to make a better story, with the changes.

It's been an adventure. As I said, I did not expect to get anything done during those six weeks, and in fact I managed — almost — to keep up with the correspondence, and I got some short projects done.

Knowing that it was coming up, I planned my time so that I had a lot of short little things that I could work on, that were easy to pick up and put down, because you can't maintain any kind of continuity of thought when that kind of thing is going on. The construction people were here the first two and a half weeks, every single day except for the Sunday of the first weekend. Sometimes they were here as early as 7 in the morning.

Is that because it's expensive to send people overseas and it was an American production?

No, a lot of the people were local, because we've got Ardmore Studios right here, five minutes away from the house. Ardmore is becoming more and more recognized as an up-and-coming major European film center, and in fact we've got about ten or twelve films shooting here this summer. Right now, the Disney Channel is shooting *OLDE CURIOSITY SHOP*. A new Mel Gibson film, *BRAVEHEART*, based on William Wallace, the great Scottish patriot, is starting on July 13, and that one is going to have, literally, a cast of thousands. They got free use of either twelve or fifteen hundred men from the Irish Army to work as extras. And filmmakers, especially American film makers, are discovering that it's cheaper to film in Ireland than in England, certainly, and that the Irish crews are just really super.

That's exciting for Ireland's economy, as well.

Oh, definitely. There's a trickledown effect, of course. Every time a film comes in, the whole community benefits. The hotels, the restaurants, the photography shops that process the still work, the printer here in Bray — I'm thinking of specific people that I know here in Bray that have gotten extra work because of the films.

Tell me about your family. I talked to your son Cameron when I was arranging this interview.

Cameron is twenty and going to school in Derby, in England, and my husband is Scott MacMillan. We've been married for eleven years.

So Cameron is from a previous marriage?

He's my stepson, actually. He's my son, too, now: I've had him longer in a *thinking* mode than his birth mother did. I have to say, there are great advantages to acquiring your child partially grown already. I don't have any great affinity for very small children. I acquired Cameron at age nine, so actually I've had him more than half his life.

So how did you get started writing? Did you begin as a child?

I always told stories, and I read a lot — I was a voracious reader. In college, I had a science scholarship, and I had to maintain a B average. Well, cool. For a full tuition scholarship to the University of Miami, which was an expensive school, I could do that. But I could take honors classes in humanities and social sciences, and I did a lot of academic writing and research. That was where I really got turned on to history.

I think I have to blame Star Trek for actually being the catalyst to get me writing fiction.

I think I have to blame Star Trek for actually being the catalyst to get me writing fiction again. I took a creative writing course as an undergraduate, and it was not terribly successful because the professor did not like science fiction and that was what I wanted to write. I went to medical school for a year, and it was during that year that I wrote the novella that later became **DERYNI RISING**. And when I quit medical school, I decided to go back to graduate school and get a master's in history, because that was what I was really interested in, and also then to try writing. I was at University of Miami for one year after med school. Then I went out to UCLA and finished my master's there.

So you spent, in effect, six years as an undergrad?

I spent four years as an undergrad, a year in med school, and then a year kind of "off", where I just took a course each semester while I was working full time to get some savings built back up. While I wasn't in debt after a year of med school, I didn't have any savings either. Then my mother got a job at Sacramento State College in the summer of '68, so I moved out to California with her because I knew I wanted to go to graduate school out there. We lived in Sacramento and I worked there at KOVR television for six months, waiting for the winter quarter to start and adding to my savings. That was when I discovered science fiction fandom, and that was another factor in getting me writing, because I went to BayCon in '68. I had no idea that there was such a thing as fandom, and I was in the local library because that's one of the places one goes for solace in a new town, when one doesn't know anybody. I saw a flyer talking about this BayCon thing. I wrote to the address and said, "What's a BayCon?" I found out it was going to be right there in Oakland, and I had a friend from high school I could stay with, so I went to BayCon!

I knew there was going to be a costume competition, so I had thrown together a costume. I got together with two guys that I met at the convention and we went to a second-hand clothing place and we got some stuff to throw together costumes for them, and we did a group costume, and we won! You couldn't do that at a WorldCon these days, but in those days it was still possible.

The big break was that I met Steve Whitfield, who had written "The Making of Star Trek", and we were talking about writing, and somehow got around to the fact that yes, I thought I wanted to write; I had written a couple of *Star Trek* scripts while I was still in Florida and I had submitted two of them, and one of them was being considered when the series was cancelled. That at least had been encouraging!

I told Steve about a novella that I had written based on a dream, and he said, "Yes, it sounds like the makings of a great novel! You know, Ballantine Books has been reprinting old fantasy, but now they're ready to start looking for original stuff, and it sounds like this might be just what Betty

Ballantine is looking for." But he said, "Don't write just one book; write three!"

I said, "You've got to be kidding! I haven't even written *one* yet, and you want me to write three?"

He said, "Easy, here's how you do it," and he told me about writing an outline and sample chapters and so on. He said, "When you're ready to submit it, let me know, and I'll give Betty a call and tell her to expect it."

So unlike most would-be writers who get that kind of advice and just go home and say, "I wish I could write," but they don't do anything else about it, I went home and did exactly what he told me to. Along about May, I guess, I called him and said, "I've done what you told me to do. I have the outline and some sample chapters, and I'm ready to submit it!" From January to May I had been at UCLA but then I ran out of money because I was paying out-of-state tuition, and so I had to get a job, so I started working on April 1, and I was working for LAPD [Los Angeles Police Department] at the time.

Steve said, "Okay," so he called Betty, or dropped her a note or something, and I sent the stuff off, and within two weeks, I had a reply back. It was one thin envelope with the return address of Ballantine Books, and I thought, "Oh, God, it's a rejection." I remember it was a Saturday morning and I was just getting ready to go out shopping, and my hands were shaking so badly as I slipped the envelope open, that I caught the blade of my little pocket knife under the top fold of the letter and cut the top of the letter off. I didn't realize that as I pulled the letter out; I just kept thinking, "What is this strange small-size letter?" But it said, We like it and we want to offer you a contract for the three books and how do the following terms sound? I said, "Oh, my God!"

So what do you want to do when you get news like that? You want to tell everybody. Well, I didn't have any friends in Los Angeles; I had acquaintances from grad school, but no real friends yet because I hadn't been there that long, and I tried to call my mother — she wasn't home; I tried to call my father in Florida — he wasn't home; I tried to call my sister at University in Miami — *she* wasn't home. So I went shopping anyway, and I was telling clerks in the stores. It's just the kind of news you want to share with *some*body. Then I settled down and started writing the book, and the rest, as they say, is history.

Did you go back to UCLA, since now you were not dead broke?

Well, I was *practically* dead broke. I got a proper typewriter; that was the first thing I bought right off the top with the advance on signing. I stayed working for LAPD for another twelve years. I started working on the book part time: evenings, weekends, coffee breaks, whenever I could find the time to do it. And by the time I was well into the third one, I knew there was going to be a sequel, called **CAMBER OF CULDI**, and by then Del Rey was my publisher, and they said, "Oh, yes, that's fine," and so we did a contract for **CAMBER OF CULDI**. I got about two-thirds of the way through that, and Lester del Rey was my editor by then. I called Lester and said, "Lester, it isn't all going to fit into this one book. Can we make it a two-book package?" And he said, "Sure, no problem, we'll send you another contract."

I said, "You've got to be kidding! I haven't even written one yet, and you want me to write three?"

So he did, and I finished that book and started working on **SAINT CAMBER**, and I got about halfway into that one and realized it wasn't all going to fit in that one, either, so I called Lester again, and I said, "Lester, it isn't all going to fit. Can we make it a *three* book package?"

"Fine, no problem, we love trilogies." And so I think that I'm kind of responsible for the great proliferation of trilogies. People seem to think that fantasy has to come in threes now. I know Tolkien did it before I did, but Tolkien is in a class by himself. But I think I was the first one after Tolkien to start doing trilogies. And of course I did the first Kelson trilogy, and then I did the Camber trilogy, and by then the pattern was really and truly being set.

After that series, what happened? When did you finally decide to quit LAPD?

I was about to finish the first Camber trilogy, and I wanted to see if I could do something else. I had an idea for a book that later became **LAMMAS NIGHT**. I thought, "Okay, my income from my writing is getting to be such that I could probably make it at this point, with all six books still in print and bringing in good royalties. I'm gonna make this submission for 'The Lammas Option' (as it was then), and if they go for it, this will be my sign that it's time to make the change, to cut the umbilical cord." At that point I owned my own house, I knew what my monthly expenses were and what the minimum was that I needed to live on, and I felt that my royalties and advances would be sufficient to do that. So I submitted the idea, and on this one, they didn't even wait to send me a letter, they called me at work and said they wanted it. This was still Del Rey.

Has anyone else ever published your books?

I've stayed with Del Rey on the fantasy, but I've done the "Adept" series now with Ace, and there's a project called "Two Crowns for America" which I've just returned to [that's not with Del Rey]. That was originally sold to Ballantine, and unfortunately it was one that Judy Lynn del Rey had bought, and after Judy Lynn died, the next editor to get hold of it did not have the same vision of that book that I did; they were going to do it as a more mainstream book, and the editor that I was assigned, hated it.

So we bought back the book from Ballantine, and Bantam ended up with it, with a much better deal in the long run although it was a little tight at the time. So "Two Crowns" is the first of the two books that I'm doing for them, and we have yet to decide what the second one will be, though I have something in mind that I can't talk about yet. It's something nobody else has really done anything with before, and so I want to keep the approach fresh.

So through all of this, your background in history and your interest in costuming has contributed to your writing.

Yes, and my activity in the SCA [Society for Creative Anachronism], for the fighting and the costuming and the heraldry — all of that stuff. I was doing that at the same time that I was finding my footing as a writer, and so the two kind of complemented one another.

Did you actually do any fighting yourself?

I armed up a couple of times at practice sessions just to know what it was like to be in armor and so on, but I

wouldn't have thought of being a serious fighter. That's too much like getting seriously hurt! I did do stuff with the Equestrian Guild. I used to bring my horse to events, and I used to ride as a scout at wars, things like that, and that was fun.

"Two Crowns for America" is set during the American war for independence, and I've not worked in that historical period before, so that's turning out to be a lot of fun. And **LAMMAS NIGHT** was [set in] World War II. For that book, I got to use my real-world history training, as opposed to writing in a fantasy world that's based on history but where you can make changes, obviously. In **LAMMAS NIGHT**, I tried to make all the historical stuff as dead accurate as I could, and I'm trying to do the same kind of thing with the "Adept" series.

Recently you've been working on some collaborations.

Yes, that one [Adept] is a collaboration.

Is it easy for you to work with a collaborator?

The way we work, it's more of a senior partner/junior partner arrangement rather than a true collaboration—almost like a master/apprentice sort of thing, a younger writer with lots of potential but needing polish, teamed with a senior writer. So I do a very detailed outline, sometimes 80 or 90 pages — we're talking about DEtailed, because if I have something firmly in mind, it's to both our advantage if I give her as much detail as possible, because then we don't have to do as much rewriting. Then she proses it, and she sends me installments of four or five chapters at a time. Meanwhile, I can be working on whatever solo project I'm working on. About every four to six weeks I get an installment, and I knock off for about a week to go over that and polish it, and then I send that back. Meanwhile, Debbie's working on the next installment. And then when the whole thing is done, she works on her next solo project while I polish up the final thing and get the outline in gear for the next one.

Where's she located?

She's in Scotland.

So it's not like you're working with a collaborator in the States.

Oh, no, no. We send disks back and forth; that seems to be the best way to do it at this point. Neither of us has a modem right now. But we do have identical programming on our computers. *I don't write fiction or work with collaborators, but both Marion and I have a real commitment to helping new writers get started and get on the right foot. It's very inspiring, really, to work with these people and feel like you're helping them fulfill their dreams.*

Oh, absolutely! I do that kind of thing on a smaller scale. I'm usually mentoring a couple or three writers at a time with particular projects that they're working on. It started out that way, kind of, with Debbie [Deborah Turner Harris] — she had one trilogy under her belt, and Betty Ballantine made a point of introducing the two of us at the WorldCon in Brighton a few years ago. She felt we should know one another, and she had bought each of our first trilogies and thought we'd have a lot in common, which we did. So that was how that friendship started.

I have enormous respect for Betty.

Oh, she's incredible, absolutely incredible. And I will always bless her for having had the faith in me to snap up the three-book set from a total unknown.

I've been working with Christie Golden lately, also. She's a young author, and her first book for TSR, **VAMPIRE IN THE MISTS**, was excellent, especially for writing in somebody else's universe. I'm encouraging her on some solo projects outside the TSR realm. I spent two half days with her in the spring. We went over the outline of the book she's currently working on, just to get it squared away. So often, when you go over an outline with somebody, you can see the hole but they can't see because they're too close to it, and so I think it's a real strong outline now; in fact, I just got the first three chapters in the mail yesterday, and I haven't had a chance to look at it yet. But we'll see now how well she took my counsel. (laughs)

She's very good, she's very eager to learn and is really approaching the whole process in a very mature way. And she's not so wound up with ego the way a lot of young writers tend to get sometimes.

Do you work with an agent?

Yes! Russ Galen is my agent. It's turned out to be a very good partnership. He's a really good negotiator, and a really nice person on top of it.

Do you have time between writing and watching them destroy your house, to have any other hobbies?

Well, restoring the house is one of our hobbies, and that's an ongoing one, but the nice thing about that is that you can enjoy it 24 hours a day. It's not like having old cars, where you maybe take them out on the weekend, or horses where you can only go out and ride them when the weather is fine, and when you work at home, of course you get to enjoy your house much more than if you have to go out to a 9-to-5 job.

How did Scott come into your life?

Scott came into my life originally back in Santa Monica [so presumably during Katherine's UCLA days]. We met Scottish Country Dancing. We weren't ready for each other first time 'round. We dated for about six months and then went our separate ways. I was already a published author, and he wasn't sure what he wanted to be when he grew up. I was 24 or 25, and he was just not ready to cope with a woman who

was already successful in her chosen field. So he met somebody else, and got married, and had Cameron, and that didn't work out. He came back into my life, laid his cards on the table, said. "This is what has happened, and I think we had some interesting things going all those years ago, and I'd like to see if that potential is still there." And so I said, "Okay, I'm willing to give it a try," so we started dating, and decided this was definitely a good thing.

I had about decided that maybe I wasn't going to meet anybody this time 'round, maybe I was meant to be single in this life, and far better to be contentedly single than miserably married; happily married is best of all, but if you can't have that, then contentedly single is fine. So I don't think it's ever too late.

How do you pick the writers you work with and "mentor" ? Do they approach you, or do you choose them?

I try to pick them. You can't do very many at a time, or you burn yourself out. Debbie I definitely picked, and I can't imagine doing that particular series with anybody else. It's worked out to be an ideal partnership. Christie I met at a Darkover Con, three or four years ago, when she was still trying to sell her first book. At one, she'd sold her first novel. At the next, she bounced up and said, "Here's a copy of it!" So I felt obligated to at least try to read it, and it was a good little book, and brilliant in spots! So I wrote back an encouraging letter and told her how much I enjoyed it, so I've been kind of following her career, and just in the last year or so, she's been picking my brain increasingly when we do see one another at conventions, and asking for advice, and I think she's got some good potential there, so it's worth putting in a little investment of time there. One of the nice things when you've been at this for a while and you do have a solidly established position in the genre, is that you can — it's *time*, in fact — to start passing on your expertise to the next generations coming up and helping them along, because we're all where we are because other people gave us breaks and gave us inspiration, and it's gotta be a reciprocal thing; that's how you pay them back, not the person that did it for you, but somebody else.

How long have you owned horses?

I got my first horse in '76, not too long after I got my first house. One of the women I was working with had a small ranch, and I decided to find out how expensive it was to keep a horse, whether it was feasible, because it was something I had dreamed about all my life. As a kid, I was horse crazy, I had plastic horses and glass horses and stick horses, read all the horse books — King of the Wind and all the Black Stallion books — so I started talking to her about what it would actually cost, and obviously I would have to board [the horse] with her initially. And it wasn't all that expensive. At that point I had my salary from LAPD plus my writing income, and most of my writing income, really, was being spent on extras like travel, and then some of it started being spent on horses, and I built up my savings, too, because I had in mind, at some vague point in the future, being able to write full time. So she helped me find my first horse, and I boarded [it] with her for three or four years, and finally decided I really would like to be able to do this in a more serious way, and I decided to move out there where I could keep my horse on my own property, and so that was what I did; I moved only about a mile from where she lived, and so we could ride back and forth to each other's places. And I got a trailer, and a truck to pull it with; I was really IN to horses for a while there, had a third of an acre, and boarded a couple of other people's horses in the back with mine, and that kept down the cost of riding. It was great! For six or eight years, I rode a lot. Scott has been into horses, too, and after we got married he used to ride my horse — it was not the original one but several horses later — as a police horse. He was a reserve deputy sheriff, and Jubal, my horse, used to enjoy going out and being a "Mountie horse" on weekends. It was good training for him. He was a good police horse, too; you could shoot off his back; you could land helicopters next to him — didn't bother him. He was a really good horse. Used to take him to tourneys sometimes. I'll never forget the first time I took him to one. Somebody in clanky armor came walking by — wahoo! He wasn't used to that. But it paid off. I took him in trail trials one time, and the last obstacle on the trial — you could see horses going berserk down there, and running off and bucking and carrying on — and what the test was, there was a big black plastic trash bag with empty soda pop cans in it, and this was sitting on a bush. You had to ride up to the bush, pick up the bag, walk your horse around the bush a full 360 degrees, and then put the bag back down. Well, the other horses were having none of it! They didn't want to KNOW about black trash bags, especially ones that clanked. And when I saw what it was, I thought, ho ho, let's see about this. We walked up to it, and Jubal stopped. I picked up the bag — one ear flicks — so I shook it just a bit so he'd know what was in there, and one ear flicked again and he looked at it and sort of sighed, and I gave him a little heel and we walked around — we pivoted beautifully on the forehand, right around the bush, and then we put the bag back down and then we rode over to the judges. They were all standing there with their jaws agape. How did you teach him to do that? "Oh, that was easy." And then I told them about the SCA. Great laughter and hooting, and they loved it.

Jubal, my horse, used to enjoy going out and being a "Mountie horse" on weekends.

One last question before we run out of time: When did you end up in Ireland?

On our honeymoon, we went to England and Scotland, and while Cameron was playing his video game, we got a copy of Country Life and there was an ad in there for a castle for sale in Scotland. We thought, "Let's go take a look, just for the hell of it," and we did, and it was really cool, and then we thought, "How could we actually live in a castle?" We went home and we thought about this for a couple of years, and we finally decided, "You know, we keep going over to that part of the world on holiday so often; maybe we ought to just live there and come back to the States occasionally." We started investigating the education, and the tax situation, and so on, and decided that Ireland really was the place to go. Anne McCaffrey had already been living here for about fifteen years, and we consulted with her and she told us about the ups and down, and Cameron was ready then to make the switch from elementary school to junior high, so that was the perfect time to do it. So we decided we would come and plan to rent for the first year while we looked, and we found Hollybrooke about six months later.

Thank you, Katherine Kurtz. ❄

Artwork by Rob Alexander

No Greater Love

by Lisa Deason

The sound of the rushing river drowned out everything but the chatter of the two gypsy women no more than thirty yards from where Cieah clung to a rock, holding on for dear life. The twilight hid her from all but the most observant of eyes. She had taken care to blacken her silver-white hair that trailed along the water's surface with the pull of the current. There was little she could be do about her iridescent turquoise eyes that caught every bit of light until they almost shone. When the women walked by her tenuous hiding place, she squeezed her eyes shut to keep from drawing unwanted attention and followed their passage with her othersense.

I'm on my way, Brielle, she thought. *Mama's coming.*

When the coast was clear, she gripped the medallion on the chain around her neck and broke it in two. Before the liquid within it could escape, she pressed her mouth to the split and drank deeply. Then she released her hold on the rock and let the river take her. She had to submerge herself to avoid being spotted by another bunch of gypsies. Her entire body started to tingle, from the crown of her head, down the fluted gills at her throat, and all the way to the tip of her powerful tail.

Too soon! she thought frantically. She had expected to be much closer to the shore before the spell took effect.

The next thing she knew, she couldn't breathe. She tried to pump her tail to

Artwork by Rob Alexander

spring her to the surface but it abruptly split into two legs. When she finally got her head out of the water, she was gasping for air.

Fighting to stay afloat, she was swept past the point where she had chosen to come ashore. Figuring out how to kick with legs gave her some trouble but at last she was able to get to the river bank.

It was studded with stones that cut her hands and her tender new feet. She crawled out of the water, feeling much as she must have when she had been pushed from her mother's body twenty-five years ago. Though she had often lain upon the rocks out in the ocean to sing at the moon, she had never been totally out of the water before. Her tail had always remained submerged, the tiny gills along its length supplying the oxygen she needed until the main gills on her neck were back in the water.

The experience was frightening but the reason for her desperate act was much larger than mere fear. She continued crawling until she reached a tree she could use to pull herself to a standing position.

Her new limbs shook so violently they refused to hold her, but gradually the tremors ceased and she took her first tentative steps.

With her othersense extended to its limits, she made her way from shadow to shadow, the sounds of the gypsy camp growing louder.

Quite by chance, she stumbled upon some clothes, by the threadbare look of it a mending pile . She had wandered inadvertently into a section of the camp, unwarned by her othersense because the area was unoccupied at the moment.

Finding a cloak within the heap, she draped it around herself, and fastened the clasp at her throat. She hadn't relished the idea of going naked into the camp, but human clothing generally made her uncomfortable since her people wore none. Humans were known for their unpredictable reaction to nakedness but she resolved to make the best of the situation. The cloak, one of the least restraining human garments, was a smile of good fortune she was more than pleased to use.

Her othersense abruptly screamed a warning. She dived for cover but, unused to judging distances on foot, caught one leg in a tangle of bushes. The two gypsy men found her trying to get loose, and cursing under her breath.

The language they spoke wasn't one that Cieah knew but their actions were unmistakable. The taller tried to restrain her while the other tossed back her cloak to ogle her nude body beneath it.

Cieah gave neither of them a chance to do more than look. She tossed her head back and sang the highest note of which she was capable. The men didn't react except to stare strangely at her but several dogs began to howl from the camp.

She had forgotten the limited hearing of humans. She sucked in another breath and tried again, creeping down one note at a time until the men showed a response. Using all of the volume in her lungs, she sent them running away, clutching their ears.

She freed herself and stood, a tiny smile on her face. Unfortunately, her singing had alerted the rest of the gypsies to her presence. She could hear them running in her direction.

If she tried to escape, she might be delayed so that the hard-found and costly spell would wear off before she could get Brielle. If she were stranded on land when that happened, she would die when she returned to her natural form. Her best chance was to let them take her into the camp, simple and direct.

When the gypsies found her, she said one of the few words she knew in the human tongue: "Treisa."

They took her to the tent of the Queen of the Gypsies and threw her at Treisa's feet. Cieah spat dirt from her mouth and shoved her disheveled hair from her face.

"Leave us," the Gypsy Queen said to her people. They filed out. When the two were alone, she addressed Cieah in merlanguage. "You found a way to come on land, I see."

"Where is Brielle?" Cieah demanded. "What have you done with my daughter?"

The woman regarded her evenly, looking down upon her from the gilded chair that served as her throne. Treisa, Queen of the Gypsies, was a formidable-looking woman, with jet-black hair and eyes. She wore the many colors her people favored but with predominant shades of gold. A gold sash around her head was clasped over her right ear with a diamond pin, the mark of her rank.

"She's not your daughter any longer," Treisa said resolutely. "She's my heir and she'll rule in my place when I have gone from this world. She is a true gypsy."

"Damn you," Cieah growled. "And damn me for ever trusting you." She pushed to her feet and stared unflinchingly at the older woman. "I came to you when I was in need. I thought that for the sake of the baby you would help me."

"I did help you," the Gypsy Queen corrected. "Who found you that cove to live in after your own people sent you into exile? Who made sure you had food to eat for nine months? Who went into the water with you while you gave birth? I did."

"And who was it who, seeing that Brielle had legs and no gills yet, cut her cord and carried her away while I was too exhausted to do anything about it?" Cieah shot back furiously. "Who took her onto land before I even had a chance to hold her? Who's kept her away from me for over a year? You!"

"I knew that once you held her, you wouldn't be willing to listen to reason," Treisa said coldly. "I knew that you'd take that human child with you back into the ocean and drown her, waiting for her to sprout gills."

"She does have gills," Cieah protested. "If you'd left her in the water with me, they would have opened just fine. You know that no one can drown in the presence of a mer. There was no danger to her at all! You just didn't give her the opportunity to prove that she's as much mer as human. But there's still time. All she has to do is return to the ocean with me and her gills will open."

"What about her legs?"

The question doused some of Cieah's fury. Her daughter *should* have a tail, even though she was only half-mer. All she could think of was that Brielle was either a throwback, a tailless mer, or that her legs would somehow transform when her gills opened.

"You had no right to make a decision like that," Cieah said at last.

The Gypsy Queen leaned forward. "And you had no right to kill my son."

Cieah shook her head. "I didn't kill Brhyan. He abused the magic. His body couldn't stand the strain of turning into a water-breather over and over without rest." Even now, almost two years later, the memory of his death haunted her. She had held him while he suffocated between forms, unable to breathe either water or air, because at last his body refused to make the change yet the spell was too strong to resist entirely. It had been a horrible way to die.

"He never would have kept returning to the sea if not for you," Treisa said, her knuckles showing white on the arms of the chair. "You lured him back long after common sense told him to stay away."

Tears filled Cieah's luminous blue eyes as she thought of Brhyan with his gentle manner and laughing green eyes. He had discovered the spell that would give a human the tail and gills of a mer and had used it at first to spy upon them, learning their language and their ways.

But his original intent had been lost when he met Cieah. They had fallen in love. Even after his confession that he was actually an enspelled human, she had loved him still. She hadn't betrayed him to her people but instead had continued to meet with him. Those had been ecstatic, wonderful days, the best in her whole life.

His death had drained all joy from her. Only the discovery that she was with child kept her living but when the merfolk learned that she was to bear a half-breed, they had exiled her. Treisa was the only person she could think of who would care that Cieah was to bear Brhyan's child.

"Yes," Cieah said at last. "He should have stayed away. But that doesn't give you the right to take Brielle from me. Don't you know that she's all I have? She's all the light in the world to me!"

"As she is to me. She's the only child of my only child. I can give her a place of honor here as Princess of the Gypsies. What can you offer her? The ocean where she's an outcast, unwanted and hated by the mers? A life of exile with only you as a companion? What happens if you're killed tomorrow?"

Again, Cieah was left without an answer. "She's my daughter," she finally whispered. "She should be with me."

Treisa suddenly stood. "Come with me."

Startled, Cieah followed her out of the tent. Treisa led her to the center of the camp where a large fire roared. Children were playing a game with a ball while their elders watched and shouted encouragement. Treisa and Cieah observed them, unnoticed from the shadows.

Cieah felt her heart skip a beat as a

Artwork by Robi Alexander

girl of about thirteen appeared, toting in her arms a child with long, silvery-blonde hair. "Brielle," she breathed.

"Stay and watch," the Gypsy Queen commanded, sensing that Cieah was on the verge of bolting across the camp and wrestling the child from the girl.

Her daughter was over a year old now though she looked older. It was, Cieah knew, because of her mer-blood. They aged slightly faster than humans. Brielle was laughing and squealing, clapping her hands at the game. From the way the others catered to her, interrupting their play to let her throw the ball, it was obvious that she was adored by them all.

"Can you truly say you can give her this?" Treisa asked quietly.

Cieah felt tears flowing down her face, scalding her, for they were tears of unavoidable truth. Brielle's laughter floated across the camp to stab her heart. No, there would be no group of people to fuss over her in the ocean, no other children to play games with. There would be only Cieah, the endless ocean, and the merfolk who condemned her for being half-human.

"We have a saying among the gypsies," Treisa said. "'There is no greater love than letting go.' I know you love your child. Now you must love her enough to let her have a happy life."

Cieah's eyes were locked onto the tiny form as her mind, heart, and soul waged battle. A part of her shouted rebuttals for everything the Gypsy Queen had said but deep down she knew that Treisa was right. It would be a purely selfish act to take Brielle into lonely exile with her when she could have a better life with the gypsies.

Her voice was raw with emotion when she turned abruptly to the older woman. "Could you do this thing that you ask of me? Could you leave your child when every fiber of your being longed to keep her with you?"

The Queen of the Gypsies regarded her with eyes that were dull with grief. "I had no choice. I had to give my son up to the Reaper and he didn't ask if I wanted Brhyan to stay or not. At least Brielle is still in this world and is happy and loved." She sighed. "I was wrong to take her the way that I did, Cieah. I was afraid and I acted on impulse. But I can't send Brielle back with you now. This is the only home she knows. Won't you leave her to it?"

"Why are you even asking?" Cieah said numbly. "Your people are many and I am just one. I have no army to call on and have only this one spell to let me walk on your land and breathe your air. You've won, Treisa."

The Gypsy Queen suddenly gripped her by her arms and shook her. "It has been between you and me for all this time, Cieah, but we were wrong. We were both wrong! This is about Brielle, not about us. If you won't give me your word that you won't try to take her, I'll have to put guards on her and restrict her activities. She'll grow up afraid that she'll be snatched away in the night. Do you want that for her? I don't."

"How can I leave her here knowing that I'll never see her again?" Cieah asked, misery in her voice. "She'll never know her mother. She'll think I abandoned her!"

Treisa shook her once more, hard. "I give you my word as Queen of the Gypsies that you can see her again." She pulled a ring off her many-ringed hand and gave it to her, then showed a second ring she wore on her other hand. "They're attuned flash-rings. All you need do is think of me and mine will flash and vice-versa. I'll bring Brielle to the cove. Do you hear me? You'll see her again. And when she's older, we'll tell her the truth. She'll know who her mother is."

"How can I trust you?"

The other woman held her gaze without flinching. "May the Mother of us all cast me from her arms if I prove false to what I have sworn."

For either humans or mers it was a potent vow. "Let me hold her," Cieah said, slipping Treisa's ring onto her thumb.

The Gypsy Queen called the girl carrying Brielle over. "Allow this woman to hold our treasure."

Brielle fussed slightly at being passed to a stranger, then calmed after a moment.

"Do you know how much I love you?" Cieah whispered. "Never think I made this decision lightly or painlessly. I could easier cut out my heart and leave it here than to leave you. But I can't think of myself, I have to think of what's best for you."

The eyes that looked up into hers were the same green as Brhyan's but had the iridescent look of Cieah's. She held Brielle until she began to squirm, then gave her back to the girl.

Cieah's skin was burning and she knew the spell was running out. "I must return to the river," she said. "Take good care of her, I beg you."

"With the Mother's blessing, she'll know more happiness than either of us have," the Gypsy Queen told her solemnly.

The walk back to the river was as long as a trip around the world. With every step she took, it felt as though she were walking away from a part of herself, an invisible line between the camp and her heart stretching almost to the breaking point.

Her vision distorted by tears, she waited at the river's edge for the spell to end. When her body tingled in warning, she slipped into the water, her legs blurring into her tail and the gills reopening at her throat.

Where was she to go? A life alone in the vast ocean was a bleak existence at best. It shamed her that her own people were so blinded by prejudice that they wouldn't allow a half-breed in their midst when humans so readily accepted Brielle with her mer-blood.

Perhaps if Cieah went to them, they would listen to her now, would have learned some understanding in all the time since her exile. For the sake of her kind, she had to try.

She forced herself not to look back as she dove under the water, swimming with powerful strokes against the current. Thinking of the saying that Treisa had told her, she knew it was true. There was no greater love than letting go.

Unless, of course, it was a mother's love.

❄

Lisa Deason has previously published stories in two of the **SWORD AND SORCERESS** anthologies as well as some small press publications.

Rob Alexander lives with his wife and cat in Seattle and has been voted a Cauldron award for past work in these pages. His work can be seen at the Wizards art gallery near Seattle.

Writers' Retreat Seeks Donations

Andre Norton is heading an effort to establish a writers' retreat in Tennessee, and has recently received tax-exempt status from the IRS. Money is needed to build a library and cottages for writers. For more information, write Andre Norton at 1600 Spruce Ave., Winter Park FL 32789.

Artwork by Armand Cabrera

The Gargoyle's Burden

by L. S. Silverthorne

Cold fear trembled through the gargoyle at the sound of shouts rising above the storm winds. Voices echoed outside the cell door. The humans were coming for it now.

"Nash, it's time! Bring out the sacrifice — before the Tempest destroys the castle."

"Since the gargoyle released the princess from the sacrificial altar, it must appease the Tempest."

The gargoyle ran a scaly hand across its face, clutching at the gray tuft of hair above its pointed ear as it tried to remember yesterday — the day before — anything! Only the faint hint of a dream darted like a dragonfly near the edges of its memory. An auburn-haired

woman, a gold bracelet ... a flash of light ... then nothing. A gold bracelet. Its gaze moved to the gold bracelet wrapped tightly around its gnarled wrist. Where had the bracelet come from? The creature had a vague remembrance of a blonde-haired woman thrusting the trinket onto its wrist before being thrown into this cell.

Thunder crackled through the sky, shaking the room. The gargoyle craned its thick neck toward the window above. Rain cascaded down the misty pane in writhing sheets, the sound like an ocean swell. The gargoyle's batlike wings twitched and folded tightly against its stocky frame. It almost seemed startled by the presence of the wings.

"Nash! Hurry!"

The gargoyle's heart skipped a beat. When it slid its clawed feet across the cold stone floor and tucked them under bulbous legs, chains rasped against the floor. Surprised, the gargoyle stared down at the broken chains and the shackles around its ankles. It had no memory of being chained. Something felt terribly wrong. No time to think ... no time to remember.

Suddenly, the door burst open and silvery lightning illuminated the cell, followed by a deafening clap of thunder. Shutters rattled, the sound quickly drowned out by the roar of rain.

The gargoyle squinted, making out the silhouette of a man. The man held a torch above him, the amber glow highlighting his fear. Why did the man fear it? Had it done something terrible — something it couldn't remember? It clenched its fists. Why couldn't it remember?

With a fierce swing, the man swept the torch toward the gargoyle and it shrank back from the flame.

"Out with you, fiendish creature," the man shouted. He poked at the gargoyle with the torch, forcing it out of the corner and toward the door.

The man forced the gargoyle down a short hallway and out into the storm. Lightning slashed at the indigo blackness and the gargoyle could not see through the torrent of rain. It glanced back at the man who had halted in the threshold, the torch like a firefly in the darkness.

Below, the sea gouged at the castle walls, the foamy spray spilling over the top. The gargoyle staggered back from the edge. Was there any hope of escape? There was still a memory of the Tempest, an evil creature demanding a sacrifice. And the princess! The hazy image of a chained princess touched its thoughts again. It pinched its eyes closed, fighting to catch the fleeting memory, but it slipped away.

The bracelet around the gargoyle's wrist began to hum. Reaching down with a stocky hand, the gargoyle clawed at the bauble until it slid off its arm and into its hand. The humming sound deepened until the gargoyle felt the vibration rumbling through its hands as the bracelet grew heavy.

Thunder shook the castle as lightning split open the sky. The gargoyle turned its gaze to the banks of black clouds blanketing the horizon. Terror trembled through it when a shadowy hand slipped through the clouds and swept toward the castle.

"Where is the woman?" a voice thundered.

"The gargoyle released her," shouted someone from the darkness of the tower stairs.

"Then I will take the gargoyle."

The gargoyle struggled against the weight of the bracelet to run, but the Tempest's shadowy fingers wrapped around it. Despite its resistance, the Tempest lifted the gargoyle from the tower. The gargoyle glanced down at the dark churning sea water that lashed against the castle, the walls beginning to crumble. It stared at the bracelet, almost too heavy to carry. Would the bracelet have the same effect on the Tempest? Quickly, the gargoyle reached out and wrapped the bracelet around the Tempest's smallest finger.

The Tempest's hand grew heavier and heavier until it began to drop toward the sea. Slowly, the Tempest, a huge, shadowy creature, was dragged down from the clouds, the creature's dark arms flailing against the weight. The gargoyle frantically flapped its wings until it rose from the hand and hovered in the air as the Tempest plunged into the sea. The land quaked as a massive whirlpool spun wildly in the murky sea water. Gradually, the movement slowed until the whirlpool disappeared.

The gargoyle landed softly back on the top of the tower as the people of the castle rushed up the stairs.

"The Tempest is destroyed!" someone shouted.

A blonde woman clad in a brown cloak pushed through the crowd and moved toward the gargoyle. She touched its hands and chanted. As the woman chanted, the gargoyle's gray scaly skin slowly lightened, the scales fading, until an auburn-haired woman stood in its place.

"What happened?" she cried.

"Princess, the only way I could save you from the Tempest was to change you into a gargoyle. As a gargoyle, you were strong enough to break the chains and still intelligent enough to use the bracelet."

"I couldn't remember anything," the princess said with a gasp. "Somehow though, I figured out the bracelet's magic." She turned to glare at the man called Nash. "Now, I remember being dragged from my bed and chained to the altar."

Nash and another man fell to their knees and bowed their heads. "Forgive us, princess. We were desperate to defeat the Tempest."

Instantly, the blonde woman snapped her hands to the men's shoulders, and they were transformed into gargoyles.

"As your punishment," she said, "you will spend a few summers as gargoyles. Maybe that will make you think twice about setting yourselves above others?"

She waved a hand at them and they soared into the air, coming to rest on both sides of a ledge near the throne room window.

❄

L. S. Silverthorne is working on her second Masters degree, this time in Educational Computing. She enjoys raising goldfish and showing her Persian cat (and so far the two have been compatible). In addition to previous sales to us, she has sold a story to *Galaxy Magazine*.

Armand Cabrera is a self-taught artist and says, "I've been at it for a million years" — really since 1980. He worked for several years in the computer game field, at Lucas Films on their *STAR WARS* games and at Electronic Arts as a computer artist.

Membership in ASFA, the Association of Science Fiction and Fantasy Artists, the group which gives out the Chesley Awards, is open to anyone. It costs $18.00 a year, payable to ASFA, P.O. Box 151442, Arlington TX 76015-7442, and includes their newsletter.

Artwork by Gail Butler

The Price of Beauty

by Julie Newcomb

Princess Florentina was the most beautiful creature the sun ever shone upon.

Her summer-gold hair fell in a cascading cataract to her waist. Her smooth skin was pale and perfect, and her eyes were two twin pools of sapphire, deep and as easy to get lost in as night. Her figure was slim and supple, and she moved with a grace not usually seen outside of the realm of Faerie.

Most people wouldn't have guessed that she had been under a curse since birth. And those that would have, out of sheer perversity, would never have guessed what the curse really was.

It was the usual story: an evil fairy hadn't been invited to her christening, and, having nothing better to do that evening, came anyway. She appeared in a terrifying cloud of smoke, unfortunately right in the middle of the buffet. Her feet crushed deviled eggs as she hopped off the table, swept up to Florentina's cradle and whispered harsh, stinging words that no one quite caught. This was quite a cause for alarm for the royal family of Worthington: no one knew what the curse was. Eight scholars, three wizards, and someone who claimed to have known the fairy worked to discover it constantly, although not very effectively.

Florentina knew. Oh, but she knew. Would that she could stop getting proposed to long enough to forget!

Her looks were a curse disguised as a

blessing; nearly every man who saw her instantly, ardently adored her. She seemed to have blossomed at about fourteen. Several butlers and footmen asked for her hand that year, despite the fact that she was a princess. Most had the decency to try and court her first, although she didn't court well. She hated parties and feasts because young men were constantly trying to get her out into the courtyard with them, apparently under the pretext of stargazing but really to shower her with flattery, kiss her, and try to persuade her to elope. A year later she announced she would no longer attend such functions. A year after that she hired an all-female guard to keep away love-smitten swains. This didn't prevent young men from falling in love with her, as a discharged court magician had ensured his financial security by hawking visions of the princess. It merely cut down on the courting.

Suitors cornered her and proposed on the spot wherever she went, despite the protection of her guards. Sometimes she refused politely, sometimes rudely, and sometimes in detail.

The poetry written to her could have filled a library, the songs sung of her could have kept a choir busy for years, the flowers presented to her could have been the sole production of a garden twenty miles square.

"No, I'm quite sorry, but I won't marry you," Florentina said firmly to the youth clinging to the edge of her balcony one sultry summer evening.

"But whyever not?" he pleaded. "I have horses below, a priest waiting to make us man and wife..."

"I'm very sorry if I've caused you any trouble, but I won't."

The youth looked desperate. "You'll let me know if you change your mind?"

Florentina gazed at the heavens impatiently. "Believe me, *if* I change my mind, you'll know. Now please be off."

"Thank you, princess, I'll go. I wouldn't want us to be caught by your guards. I know how tyrannical they are." With a fond farewell and a great deal of effort, he clambered down the strong wisteria that grew up the sides of the castle, slipping on one of the worn places.

The princess sighed and wondered why she didn't accept one of her offers and have done with the whole thing. At first she had refused out of principle — she *had* been only fourteen — then out of boredom, and now it was pure obstinacy. It seemed like such a waste to give in now after a five-year uphill battle. Besides, she didn't really *like* any of her suitors, much less love them. Leaving her latest proposal to blunder through the garden, she entered her chambers, closing the balcony doors behind her. "Brecke, what happened to the balcony guard?"

Her head guard stepped in from the corridor she had been industriously guarding. "I think she took leave for dinner, your Highness."

"Well, please see that she gets a relief next time."

"Yes, your Highness." With a respectful bow, Brecke returned to her corridor.

Florentina sighed again and fished a nightgown out of her wardrobe. It had been a very long and trying day. She'd broken her own record, 57 proposals in one day (23 of them flowery ones too). She climbed under silken sheets and was soon asleep. Refusing suitors is hard work, especially when some of them have to be out-galloped.

She was awakened near dawn by a huge thump outside the castle. Florentina hastily wrestled to untangle herself from the sheets, wondering if some silly fools were trying to storm the castle again. She hated the kind of people who stormed castles; they swept you off your feet without even thinking of asking you whether you wanted to be swept. Suddenly a gigantic, scaly, taloned paw smashed through the balcony doors and snatched her off the bed. Florentina screamed. Trailing torn sheets, the talons transported her outside and clutched her to a chest of red scales. Florentina felt them rise up above the castle, up to cloud level. The flight was not long. Soon her tremendous crimson captor landed with another thump and trotted inside a cathedral-sized cave.

Abruptly she was raised to the eye level of the creature, giving her a good view of its head. "A dragon!" she exclaimed. The beast's eyes — which somehow did not look as fierce and menacing as she thought they would — studied her carefully.

"How despicable!" it said. Florentina could tell it was speaking in the lowest possible tones, but the sound was still tremendous. "Not that I should complain, since it gives me business, but you could play a little more fairly."

Florentina's forehead wrinkled. "What have I done?"

"That beauty spell — don't you think you're overdoing it a little? I wouldn't be surprised to hear that your own *father* had fallen in love with you!"

"Neither would I," said Florentina sarcastically. "Practically everyone else in the kingdom has. Do you think I *want* to look like this? I've been under a curse since birth!"

"You mean it's a curse that you're the most lovely girl who ever set foot to earth? Not one but *three* knights hired me to kidnap you, and if I didn't have this first-come first-served policy they'd fight each other after me, over you!"

"Exactly! I mean, this is the first time I've been kidnapped, but I must have been proposed to a thousand times by now. It's gotten so that the only thing I do all day is say 'No, I don't want to marry you'!"

The dragon looked pensive. "No one's tried to take the, ah, curse off?"

"No one even knows there is a curse! I tried to tell my father once, but he just laughed. Everyone else thought it was some kind of joke."

A small smile curved the jaws of the dragon. "Well, you don't need magic to change your appearance for the *worse*. Why don't you stop washing and brushing your hair, wear your worst clothes, that sort of thing. It wouldn't be a permanent solution ..."

"But it might get them off my back for a while. Thanks. Do you think you could take me home now?" she said, anxious to begin her anti-beauty treatment.

"Well, I've got those three contracts lined up ... I mean, I did kidnap you."

Florentina sighed. It seemed she'd be subjected to at least one proposal, and she hadn't even had breakfast yet.

"You can wait over here. It's where I usually put my princesses." The dragon gently moved Florentina over to a mound of cushions atop a mountain of gold.

"Did you say you were paid to kidnap princesses?" Florentina asked, more to make conversation than anything else.

The dragon chuckled. "Yes. Some prince or knight, although I do get a few poor woodcutters' sons, hires me to kidnap a certain princess. Then they come and pretend to kill me. Usually the princess's kingdom puts up a reward for her return, and that's my fee. Then my client and the princess get

Artwork by Gail Butler

married, and likely as not they live happily ever after."

"And *three* people are coming to rescue me?"

"Yes. I told the second and third ones that you were spoken for, but they wanted a shot at you anyway. First to show gets you, insofar as I have any say about it. I expect them quite soon."

"Well, just to warn you, I don't plan on marrying any of them. Especially if they're trying to impress me with a pre-arranged fight with a dragon."

"I ... oh. No, I suppose you won't want to now. I didn't mean to tell you about all that."

Florentina looked at the dragon curiously. Of course it shouldn't have told her about being hired, but it wasn't like she'd purposely tried to discover its secrets, only tried to be polite. "Have you ever accidentally told any of the other princesses before?"

The dragon looked slightly sheepish. "No. Usually they're too busy screaming to say anything to me."

Loud hoofbeats pounded up to the mouth of the cave. A knight, clad in shining armor and carrying a lance draped with heraldic flags, reined in his horse, looking every inch the conquering hero.

"I challenge the foul beast that inhabits this cavern to stand forth and do battle, so that the fair Princess Florentina may once again be free!" he proclaimed mightily.

"It's no good," the dragon said, trotting forward a few paces. "She doesn't want to marry you."

"She doesn't?" asked the knight, looking confused. He had clearly never expected this.

"No I don't!" yelled Florentina from atop her mountain. "Can't you people get it through your heads that I don't want to get married?"

"If I were you, I'd just leave and consider the contract broken," advised the dragon. "Even if we did go through the fighting routine, you'd never get her to ride away with you."

The knight was quite reluctant to leave, but as there was a huge dragon blocking his path, of which his fiery steed was scared stiff, he was in little position to do anything about it. "Remember me fondly, my lady," he called sadly, and shot away on a terror-driven horse.

The dragon sighed. "Well, I had my hopes — I guess I'm a matchmaker at heart — but you're not my typical vic-

tim. Oh well. I'll take you home now."

"What did you hope would happen, anyway?" Florentina asked. "You were the one who told him I didn't want to get married."

"Oh, I don't know," the dragon said. "True love at first sight? That's always a big plus in my work."

The return journey was much like the first — dazzlingly quick, pressed against a wall of scales.

Florentina carefully edged from the talon to her balcony. "Thanks," she said.

"Don't mention it," said the dragon, who hadn't yet noticed the area it was standing in had been a garden about an hour ago. "Remember what I said ... and if it doesn't work, you could always see a witch." It flew off, a red speck against the sky.

"Your Highness!" shrieked Brecke, as she burst through what was left of the balcony doors. "What happened?!"

"Oh, nothing," said Florentina absently, thinking of the advice. "I've had a little mishap with a dragon, but I'm fine."

The rest of the morning had truly been fun, Florentina reflected, strolling down the circular stone staircase. The dragon had only mentioned not washing and brushing her hair and wearing her worst clothes, but she didn't believe in doing things by halves. After reassuring several guards and servants that she was perfectly fine, and convincing some workers that repair on the balcony doors could wait, she got to work. Her hair was hacked to the roots, she traded one of her gowns for a tired brownish smock of a handmaid's, and climbed down the wisteria herself for some good soft mud, which went all over herself. Now, as she proceeded down the stairs, she prepared herself for a row. But it would be worth it. When it got around that the Princess Florentina was living (and looking) like a pigsty, surely fewer would propose. And she wasn't sacrificing much comfort. There was a slight all-over tingle, but that was probably because of the mud. She'd get used to it.

"Ah, there she is, my little daughter," the king greeted her as she entered the hall. *No shock yet*, she thought. *Maybe it hasn't registered?*

But her hopes were shot down. "You look as lovely as ever! Tell me, Florentina, what is it that the servants are yammering about you and a dragon?"

Florentina shrieked and dashed out of the dining hall, ignoring the shocked cries that followed. She ran straight for the only mirror in the castle (they had to be handmade by wizards, so naturally a small kingdom like Worthington couldn't afford many). It was true. She *was* as lovely as ever.

Despite her efforts, she appeared as she always had; silk dress, waist-long hair, clean, not a trace of mud. It wasn't an illusion either. Her head was a lot heavier than it was five minutes ago, and she could feel the silk rustling around her ankles. Obviously the curse was better worked out than she'd thought.

Florentina glared at her image in the mirror. It was so infuriating to still be beautiful!

And the mirror smiled back, sweetly, gently, beautifully. That was the last straw. The princess stopped herself just in time from hitting the mirror as hard as she could, although she would have loved to smash that angelic image. That was *not* her, it wasn't — except it was, and that was the maddening thing, she couldn't do a thing about her own appearance. She ran out to the stables in a rage, and with a thud, smacked into a young noble decked out in velvet and gold. Never for a moment did he lose his poise.

"Excuse me, my princess. You're as beautiful as a summer's day, gorgeous as the moon surrounded by stars. You far outshine the vision I was given of you. Would you grant me the utmost honor of being my -"

"NO!" shrieked Florentina, and had to stop herself from hitting *him*. Instead she grabbed the bridle of a horse saddled for the morning's royal procession from a convenient stable hand, mounted, and galloped away, WITCH OR BUST written in the firm lines of her forehead.

"Well," said the noble, "that could have gone worse. Do you think I could stay here until she comes back?"

"Ye'll have t'talk to someone other'n me," said the stable hand. "I already hid three near th'door. If'n I was ye, I'd try the kitchen."

Some of her rage had cooled by the time she had covered a few miles, and Florentina realized she hadn't the slightest idea where to find a witch. Fortunately she hadn't yet left the large city which surrounded the castle. "Excuse me, sir," she addressed a passing apprentice. "Do you know where I could find a witch?"

"Uh, er, yes, there's, er, old Mad Marion, um, in the, in the woods, sort of, um, near the, Faerie's Pool. Ah, um, er, you, er —"

"Thank you," said Florentina, before he could start stammering remarks about the weather. "Could I borrow a bit of parchment and a charcoal?"

The apprentice dashed off, returning with her requests. Hastily she scrawled a note to her parents, reassuring them that she was all right and had gone to remove the curse that had hung over her since birth. This set her at ease a bit, since after all she *had* left suddenly after screaming in her father's face.

"Deliver this to the castle," she directed, and ripped a bit of gold embroidery off the saddle for payment.

The apprentice stared at the mortal goddess trotting away, pressed the bit of parchment to his chest, and swooned.

The Faerie's Pool, Florentina mused. She knew exactly where it was because she had repeatedly been told not to go near it, and had even been informed of its precise location so that she might avoid it more easily.

Presumably Mad Marion was the reason. If she was like most witches she wouldn't hurt a paying customer, and there was plenty of gold left on the saddle for that. Florentina didn't even consider the fact that Mad Marion might not be the only danger by the Faerie's Pool.

Something else was waiting, albeit waiting boredly, but waiting...

"Hellllpppp!"

Florentina looked up sharply from the daydream she'd fallen into and kicked the horse into a gallop. She'd heard enough about this sort of thing to know that when you were on a quest, you helped anyone in need, and rarely did something bad come of your assistance. Besides, the scream seemed to have come from the northeast, basically in her path anyway.

"Aaauugh! Stop! Whoooaaaa!"

She could see the screamer as she rounded a bend in the road. A dark-haired young man was hanging onto his madly galloping horse for dear life. She forced her own mount into an extra burst of speed and snatched at the swinging reins, bringing horse and rider to a careening halt. The screamer

Artwork by Gail Butler

flew out of the saddle and hit the road.

Florentina hastily dismounted. "Are you all right?" she asked, helping him to his feet — and was suddenly confronted by a face as heartbreakingly handsome as hers was beautiful, a face of youth and nobility and honor. It was a face to cross worlds for, a face to live and fight and die for.

Evidently the face was thinking generally the same things about her. "Ye gods," he muttered, staring deeper into her sapphire-bright eyes.

Florentina suddenly felt hot and edgy. "Er, are you all right?"

"I think so," he replied. "I must have just skinned my forehead."

"I don't see anything," she said, wondering if he'd hit his head instead of scraping it. His fingers felt his forehead — it really did look smooth and unhurt — and wiped them on her palm.

Florentina stared at the blood on her hand. "You did cut yourself. But —" She blinked suddenly. "You're under a curse like me! The most handsome prince in the world?"

He nodded. "That must make you the most beautiful princess. It's awful, isn't it?"

She nodded and grinned sympathetically. "What are you doing here in the woods?"

"Seeking a witch's help in removing the curse."

Florentina wondered what he would look like with the curse taken off. Now that she was over the initial shock, his good looks slightly sickened her. After all, look what her beauty had done for her, and it must have been just as bad for him. "Me too! Mad Marion?"

"By the Faerie's Pool."

"It seems silly not to travel together if we're going the same way. Do you mind?"

"Not at all." He mounted, rather awkwardly. "Shall we go?"

Florentina swung into the saddle and nudged her horse forward. The prince's followed without any signal from him, which was probably just as well under the circumstances. "What's your name?" she asked.

The prince went slightly red and mumbled something, but at Florentina's querying glance he repeated himself. "Prince Charming," he said, and looked like he wanted to hide.

"How awful!" gasped Florentina. "That's horrible. I'll — I'll call you Charles if you like, it's pretty close to Charming. I can't believe — what got into your parents anyway?"

"They thought it was cute," muttered the prince, and cleared his throat. "What should I call you?"

"I'm really Florentina, but call me Florrie." Florentina had always wanted a nickname and seized the opportunity with both hands.

Charming thought of the name Florrie, and pictured a silly little button-nosed girl who skipped a lot and gurgled silly little brook's-babble songs. On the other hand, he didn't look much like a Charles either (somehow Charleses weren't quite as easy to picture as Florries, but he probably didn't) and he'd *much* rather be called that than Charming. "Sure."

They greatly enjoyed each other's company. Both were relieved to find someone who understood the curse, and, what's more, someone who wasn't overwhelmed by their beauty. Florrie told of several of the more outrageous proposals, including the dragon incident, and Charles related tales of the simpering ladies who flocked to visit him, and instead of asking him to marry them tried to make *him* ask *them*, and dropped the most annoying little hints all the time. Happily discussing the

price of beauty, they rode for the rest of the day.

"This is really dumb," complained an imp. "Who knew asking riddles would be this hard? I mean, it's not like that many people *come* here. Who said that we had to ask this stupid riddle to a thousand travelers anyway?"

"The Faerie Queen," answered the fay crossly. "And if you want to try disobeying orders from *her*, you just go right ahead."

"Just because it's called the Faerie's Pool, we have to be here. People avoid this place, for goodness' sake," the imp grumbled on.

"Guess what!" cried a sprite running in from sentry duty, so excited that every now and then it flapped its wings and left the ground entirely. "A pair of humans — numbers 999 and 1000 — are headed this way!"

"You mean we just have to ask them the riddle, grant them the wish, and we're free?" asked the fay, jumping to its feet.

"Only if they get it right. If not, we kill 'em like the rest," said a hobgoblin with an evil smirk.

"No!" cried the imp sharply. "We're not going to kill them! This time I get to turn them into toads. They're the last ones, no matter what happens, and you never let me turn anybody into a toad. I've never even seen it happen!"

"All right, all right, you can do whatever you want," said the fay.

"It won't matter anyway," proclaimed the hobgoblin gloomily. "Around five people have answered the riddle right so far, remember? They've probably bragged about it so much, everybody knows the answer now!"

"Oooh, you're right! Can I change it? I've got a good one, they'll never guess it!"

"Fine, fine, fine," said the fay, who was ready to agree with anything if only to stop the imp from grumbling.

"Get ready get ready get ready!" sang the sprite. "They're only about a ten-minutes' ride from here! We're almost free!"

"Look, there's the Pool!" cried Charles.

"It looks creepy," said Florrie. "That mist ... and it's almost twilight. No wonder people avoid this place."

"Hear that?" hissed the imp, in such a way that neither human could hear it. "They think it looks creepy!"

"Good," the hobgoblin replied. "They don't think as well when they're scared."

"Let's spring it now," said the fay.

Suddenly fingers of solid mist, clammy and cold, knocked the prince and princess off their horses, dragged them to their feet, and bound them back to back. Both shrieked and struggled, to no avail.

The four faeries leapt out from behind trees, grinning wicked grins that soon turned to befuddled expressions.

"Are you sure these are humans? They look faerie to me."

"Check their ears."

The sprite fluttered up and brushed fair hair away from the side of Florentina's head. "Nope, these are round."

"And their eyes aren't deep enough — at least, this one's aren't," reported the imp, hovering three inches from Charles's face.

"Would you stop examining us and let us go!" he yelled. Despite the show of bravado he was pale.

"Oh, we'll let you go — if you can answer our riddle," said the fay, restored to self-confidence.

"And if you can't we'll kill you,"

Artwork by Gail Butler

sniggered the hobgoblin.

"No, we'll turn you into toads," the imp said half eagerly, half smugly. "D'you think they'll disappear in a cloud of smoke and only toads will be left, or will they shrink and grow warts right before our eyes?"

"Be quiet," said the fay.

"Go ahead and ask us," said Florrie bravely, and gripped her hands tightly to keep them from shaking.

"Well, you were the one with the wonderful question, you ask," the fay told the imp.

"I found this out from a wandering magician," smirked the imp. "He specialized in visions or something. Amazing what you can pick up from humans. I mean —"

"Go on and *ask*!" cried the fay in exasperation.

"Okay, okay. *Ha*-hem. Who are the most beautiful people ever to set foot to earth? I know that's more like a trivia question, but..."

The relief broke like a warm flood, and was so strong that the pair broke out into silly grins. "Us! It's us!" giggled Florrie.

The faeries registered double takes. "You're not Princess Florentina and Prince Charming IX?"

"Yes," gasped Charles, and collapsed into the same helpless laughter Florrie had already fallen into.

"Aaaaaaaugh!" wailed the imp. "This is so anticlimactic! Here they are, our *last* humans, my last chance to turn somebody into a toad, and they not only know the riddle, they *are* the riddle!" Its voice became a sort of whiny sniffle. "Ninety hundred and ninety-eight humans they wouldn't let me turn into toads, they never let me turn anybody into a toad, and now I never will, I always wanted to ..."

"It's your own fault," the fay said. "You should have known better than to ask a question like *that* to people who look like *them*! You should have just asked them to name you the last three dragons killed by earthly knights or something."

"That's pretty good," said the ever-cheerful sprite.

The mist-ropes fell away, and Charles and Florrie, still chuckling, stepped apart. "All right, what do you want to wish for?" the fay asked grumpily.

"I don't quite trust them to undo the curse — what else should we wish for?" whispered Florrie.

"Let's just wish our way to the witch." When Florrie offered no objections, he announced, "We wish to be transported to the witch Mad Marion."

The fay gestured wildly, looking more like a child in a fit of rage than an elusive faerie practicing magic. The prince and princess faded away.

"You go tell Mad Marion to give 'em her worst, regular fee," the fay told the hobgoblin.

"Tell her to turn them into toads," the imp sniffed.

"I've got a better idea," said the hobgoblin, with a slow, evil grin.

Florrie awoke on a forest floor, staring at sprays of leaves waving against the sky. How did she get here? A tiny note of panic hit her throat. Where was Charles? She got to her knees, rubbing her temples. He was only a little way away, half lying on his stomach, looking like he'd been thrown off the top of a tree. *Which is probably pretty close to what happened to us*, she thought, *only gentler because I don't seem to have broken anything* ... "Charles, Charles, wake up."

He blinked a few times. "What?...Oh. *Oh*. Those faeries really didn't like us, did they?"

"Well, either they took all night getting us here, or we were unconscious all night. But they kept their word. There's a hut just up ahead."

Hut was the right word to describe it. The hovel was clumsily built out of rough-hewn wood, though old enough to have a certain falling-apart grace, with a thatched roof and a crooked clay chimney, belching some very odd smoke. Hand in hand, they walked up to the door.

"Go away!" shrieked an irate voice before they had even knocked.

"But wait!" called back Charles. "We're —" he glanced at Florrie and shrugged "— customers."

That apparently struck the right note with the witch. "Greetings!" The door was flung open, revealing an interior nearly as hutlike as out. Dust lay thickly over scrolls, unwashed dishes, and strange concoctions of herbs, except where the rats had disturbed it. And Mad Marion matched her house perfectly. "What is

Artwork by Gail Butler

it that my Lord and Ladyship need?"

"Ah ... we're both under a curse we'd like removed," said Florrie, recovering her self-possession.

"And that I'll do glad, if you'd just pay up front," the witch wheedled. Mad Marion believed in playing both ends against the middle. She could easily remove the curse and then follow the hobgoblin's instructions, thereby collecting from both.

Florrie passed her a small skein of gold thread, peppered with small bits of leather she hadn't been able to remove. Charles added a few gold coins.

"Splendid, do come in," the witch cooed. As the prince and princess walked hesitantly to the center of the room, she closed her eyes. All her fingers twitched, in unison.

"Yes, I can sense a curse, not too strong, but very neat work ... should be easy to remove. Hmm, lessee, thyme, wolfsbane, maybe some nightshade ..." The witch's hands flew into jars and plucked leaves off hanging bundles of herbs. With incredible deftness she ground the mess in a mortar and pestle, then scooped it into her hands.

"Now hold still," she instructed. Both their faces were smeared with the brownish glop. then splashed with none-too-clean water. Odd, thought Florrie, how the water got all that stuff off. And I tingle the way I did yesterday morning, coming down the stairs ... Marion passed them a mirror. "They really don't have to be handmade by wizards," she remarked conversationally. "Any witch worth her salt could make a dozen a day, but we don't because it's smart to stay on a wizard's good side ..." She waited for some response, but there was none. Because neither of them were listening.

They were staring wide-eyed at the mirror. And they were still beautiful.

All right, maybe Florentina's face wouldn't have inspired spontaneous proposals anymore, and Charming's looks no longer equated hordes of simpering wife-wannabes. But they were still a long way from ugly. Heck, they were still a long way from plain. If they once had aspects people would kill for, people might now go as far as a non-fatal stabbing. And if this wasn't frustrating, Florentina didn't know what was.

The motherwort and saffron, Mad Marion thought, should kick in just about ... now.

Their faces rippled and changed once more.

The mirror clattered to the floor as each whirled to gaze at each other.

Charming was tall and frighteningly thin, with opaque blue disquieting eyes, oddly discolored skin, stringy shoulder-length salt-and-pepper hair, and a curving beak of a nose.

Florentina was short and slightly humpbacked, with eyes the color of mud, hair dirty enough-looking to *be* mud, and skin which rippled with wrinkles and warts of every sort imaginable.

It is difficult to describe their emotions as they realized they had gone from being beautiful as the day to uglier than the night (much uglier, as most will agree nights can be beautiful too). They felt free, and lucky, blissfully unattractive, and suddenly they knew they were in love, and had been ever since they laid eyes on each other, which was only a day but that didn't matter because love is love no matter how long it's been ...

Perhaps it would be sufficient to say that they felt very, very beautiful. Or very, very repulsive, if you want to look at things from their point of view.

Marion stared at the kissing couple. This was *not* what was supposed to happen, even though she'd followed the hobgoblin's instructions to the letter and made them the ugliest people she'd ever hope (or not hope) to see. "Uh, well," she began, "you're, er, I mean, I've (oh, forget it) — could you leave, please?"

Charming swung the transformed princess into his arms and strode out of the hut. Florentina leaned over his shoulder. "God bless you, Marion," she said fervently.

Their first act (after getting married, and nearly scaring a priest out of his wits) was to write home and tell their Royal Parents all that had befallen them. Their Royal Parents thought them mad, and had a bard write a rather prettier end to their lives (drowned in each other's arms, apparently, for vague reasons once you got past all the flowery description). By the time ten years had passed, Princess Florentina, whose face had launched a thousand courtships, and Prince Charming IX, whose noble features caused the sun to set in shame, were no more than a pretty legend. Most of the unwanted suitors and the simpering ladies married (some of the unwanted suitors married among the simpering ladies), and only the petty ones ever spoke of the vanished pair again, and then in particularly fierce spats.

Charles and Florrie set up a house for themselves somewhere in the woods. It was rather like Marion's (only cleaner) for they had decided that their best vocation, looking as they did, would be a witch/warlock partnership. They bought another charm from Marion to make them look like young boys, and took on an apprenticeship with a kindly old wizard, until they had learned enough magic to teach themselves from ancient dusty tomes of lore bought from used bookshops.

They heartily enjoyed their trade, once they had a suitable reputation set up. It was like play-acting every time a customer walked in. To a casual observer, the crotchety old woman by the fire was Druiselda, and the strange tall man with weirdly staring eyes was Nazern, but to themselves they were always Charles and Florrie. Or Charming and Florentina when they were fighting, as they did every now and then.

As they grew better at their craft they upgraded to a sinister Black Tower. Charles became a wizard, although Florrie, officially, was still a witch (her skill was equal to that of a sorceress, but as none of the customers had never heard of a sorceress who wasn't beautiful, she forcibly remained a witch). They became experts at illusion, though rumors, gossip, and other forms of advertising stated there was nothing either of them couldn't do. They delighted in confusing customers with various disguises. On a few occasions they even exchanged appearances and played each other. However their favorite forms were always the ones the witch had given them, and the townsfolk would never have believed that the room of solid mirrors in the tower wasn't used for magic at all.

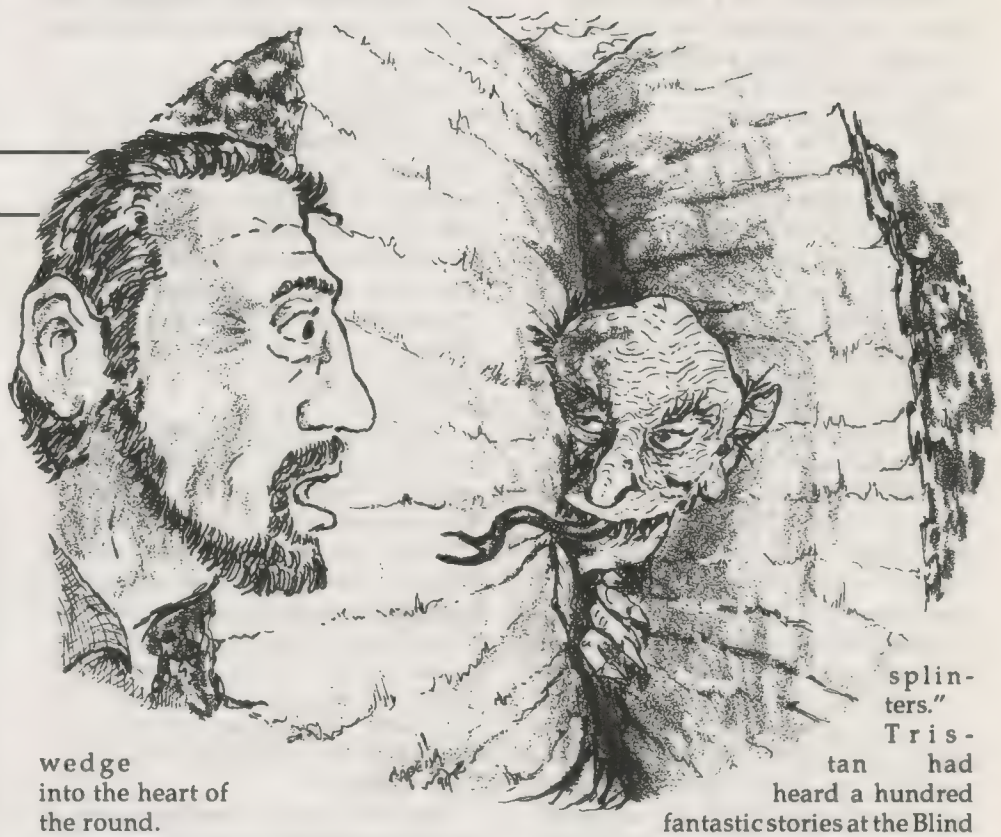
❄

Julie Newcomb is a high school student in Brea, California, where she is on the school newspaper's staff. Her stories have previously won awards at the Orange County Fair. She would like to dedicate this to Mrs. Twidwell.

Gail Butler is well-known in the Northwest as an artist, art teacher, and fan. In her spare time she is a volunteer Jewish mother to Northwest art fandom. She has been a regular contributor to these pages.

The Woodman's Tale

by Bob Dennis



The clarity of sunlight in the Fall was magical, Tristan observed as he walked out to the tool shed, buttoning his leather jerkin against the chill morning air. It was as if pure quartz had replaced the air, holding the world still in its cool crystalline claws, waiting for the bite of Winter. No season was better made for splitting wood than Fall, Tristan thought.

He retrieved his maul, soaking in a bucket of water to keep the chicory handle swollen and tight, and his favorite wedge with the pounded head that shone like marcasite. He walked to the pile of rounds, heat for his little house. He needed ten cords stacked not too tight and not too hollow, so the mouse could flee but the cat couldn't follow. The wood came from the Dark Forest to the north, old trees. The big rounds were the size of a table for four at the Blind Sisters Tavern and the bark was gnarled and thick.

Tristan tapped his wedge in place, listening for the solid tink that told him it was firmly set. He took his first swing slow and easy to distance the arc and loosen his back muscles. The grain of the wood snapped as a small crack opened across the top. The second swing sunk the wedge halfway down, popping knots. The third swing dropped the wedge head into the round and the wood creaked loudly but remained whole. One more shot and I'll have to fetch another wedge, Tristan thought, raising his maul to drive the wedge into the heart of the round.

"Nooo!" a muf- fled voice cried from inside the wood. "Another half inch and you'll split my skull in two."

Tristan jumped away from the round, falling backwards and dropping his maul.

"Finish the job man, have a go at it from the side. I haven't seen the light of day in three-hundred years," the voice said.

Tristan crawled to the side of the round and peered into the crack. He saw nothing, but it smelled musty and putrid, as if he had split into a nest of wood worms.

"Get my head free and then we'll look for the rest of me," the voice said.

Tristan asked, "Who's in there?"

"I'm Grondil, a simple woodsman imprisoned in this tree, cursed by an evil wizard. If you could just get this round split open I could explain more, but right now I still have a lipful of splinters."

Tristan had heard a hundred fantastic stories at the Blind Sisters, always chipping in a copper to wet the storyteller's throat. Farmers complained of cows gone dry because they'd seen a ghost wandering furrowed plots that had once been bloody battlefields. Lonely shepherds who returned to town missing a sheep or two accused beautiful meadow nymphs of trickery. Coachmen rolled in late because of surly bridge trolls. Tristan drank every word. His life was a desert and the stories were sweet rain from another world. But that world had never touched Tristan, until now.

No story he had ever heard compared to a man trapped in a tree. He imagined himself at the tavern telling Grondil's story. How he broke a wizard's curse with his maul and his muscle. For once someone would buy him a tankard of ale to help his voice through a tale.

He picked up his maul and climbed

Artwork by Ray Capella

atop the round. Straddling the split, he gave a sharp blow to the side. Bark snapped and flew off in all directions and Tristan felt the wood shudder beneath his feet.

"Good, another, put your back into it" the voice urged.

Tristan drove his maul deeper into the round's side and then twisted the handle back and forth.

"Harder, it's splitting," the voice cheered.

Tristan put all his weight on the handle and the round cracked like thunder, throwing him to the ground.

"Ahhh, light," said a much clearer voice. "Fall light! What's the date, lad?"

"You're welcome, and it's October 31," Tristan said, rubbing his head. He stood up and walked around to the front of the split round. "You're no simple woodsman!" he shouted, horrified at the head that was still half-lodged in the wood. The face looked like it had been carved from rotted wood. The eyes were dark knot holes, the teeth, thorns.

"No, you're the simple woodsman." The head in the round laughed and then began to cough. It cleared its throat and spat out red termites. "That's better. Even a goblin can only take so much. Grondil the Goblin, lad."

"Why did you lie to me?"

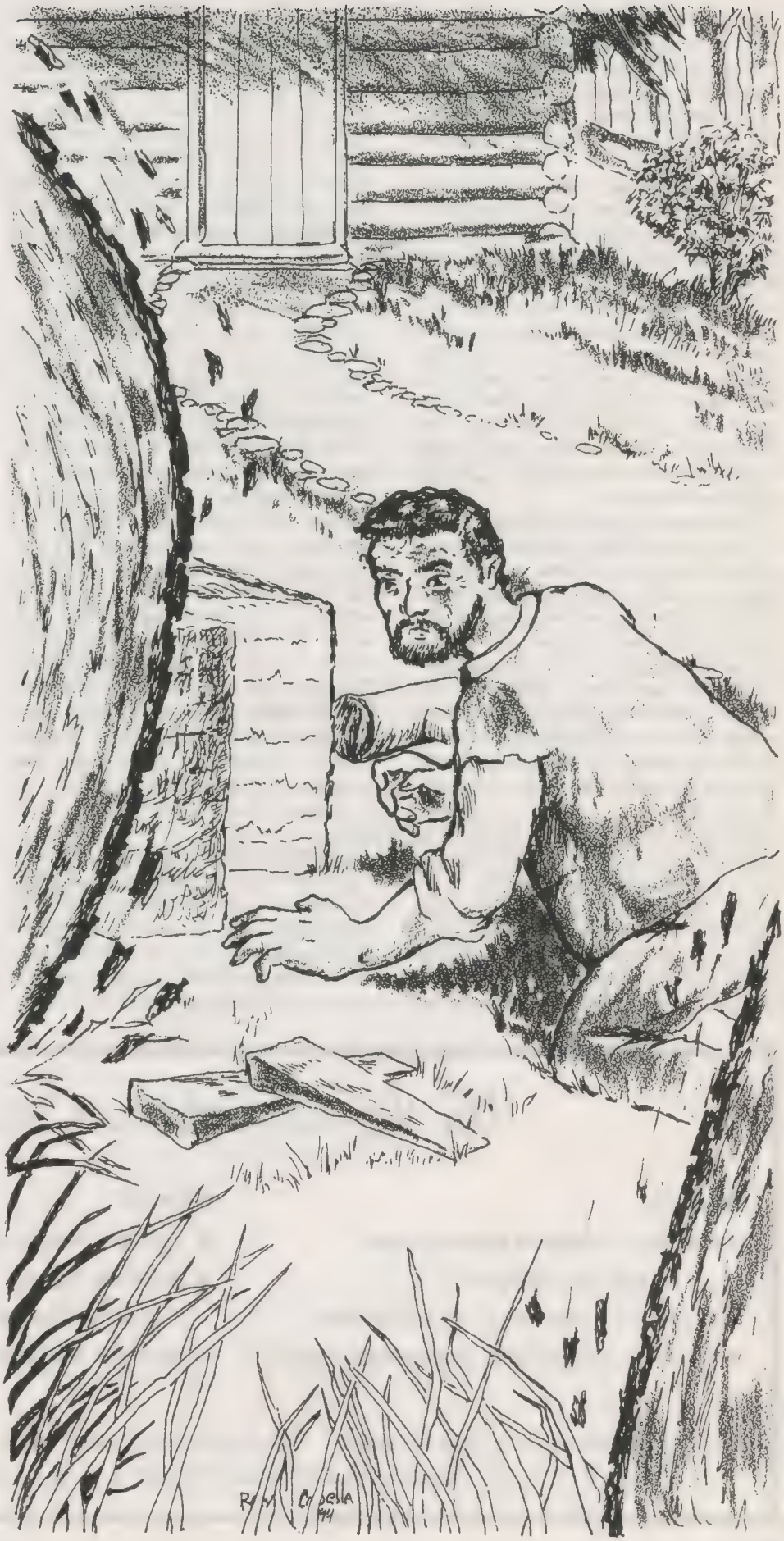
"My tongue was made for lying," Grondil said and he stuck the forked black thing out at Tristan. "Besides you wouldn't have been so quick to help me if I told you I was a goblin."

"But what are you doing in a tree?" Tristan asked.

"I was trapped in here, that part's true. Captured by a priest." Grondil hissed the word 'priest' and a cloud of sawdust sprayed out through the gaps between his teeth. "Three-hundred years ago today he tied me to a sapling with a rope dipped in stinking holy water. But he's dust in the ground and I'll soon be free of this round."

"Priests don't tie creatures to trees without good reason and he may be dust in the ground, but you're still rot in a tree trunk as far as I'm concerned," Tristan shot back, alarmed at Grondil's evil tone.

"Pretty strong words to be using with a goblin. But then most of me is still wrapped in bark. Why don't you fetch your axe and get the rest of me out, I've got this three hundred year old itch and I think you're just the lad to scratch it for me."



Artwork by Ray Capella

As Grondil spoke Tristan saw two rounds at opposite ends of the wood pile tip up on their sides and roll towards him. Just before his legs would be crushed between them he jumped out of their path and they slammed together.

"You've lied and blasphemed and now threatened me within five minutes of getting your mouth freed from the wood, Heaven forbid I free the rest of you."

"Come now, man, you've nothing against me. I may be a goblin and priests may not like our lot very much, but this is my day. I was promised freedom on the three-hundredth Halloween of my captivity. You can't deny my right, besides you're safe from me, I only want the flesh of little ones tonight," Grondil said, drooling sap.

This was not the story Tristan hoped to tell at the Blind Sisters. Setting a goblin free to eat children would earn him a trouncing behind the tavern. He wished he had never set eyes on the tree Grondil was trapped in. What a brave man the priest who had defeated him must have been. With only his tongue freed the goblin was powerful and dangerous and Tristan had no holy water; his arms, his back, the simple tools of a woodsman, these were his only prayer.

Tristan looked for his maul. The handle which he had cut and bent and worn smooth with the calluses of his hands was snapped in two. It was a sad sight and in the lore of woodsmen, a bad omen. The old woodsmen's rhyme went: broke at the head was a handle worked too long, broke in the mid, no man is that strong. How could he defeat a goblin?

Grondil softened his tone. "Look lad, maybe I've been a bit rough. Didn't even thank you, but three-hundred years of woodpeckers rat-a-tatting in your ears would drive a devil to tears. I've not completely forgotten how to deal with men-folk. You'll be wanting something in trade for freeing the rest of me."

Tristan started to object to Grondil's words, but the goblin cut him off.

"No, no lad, there's a goblin's corner in every man's heart, and I know that place like I know the back of my hand, wherever that is. There's always a secret wish there, what'll it be? Riches to fill an empty life or maybe your little house is too big without a wife?"

The goblin in Tristan's heart whispered a wish list to him, but Tristan did not listen. He knew Grondil was setting a trap for him because he'd heard the "Grant a Wish" story enough times to know it never came to a good end. Many men had been cut by the teeth hidden in the bait of a granted wish. They sat in the dark corners of the Blind Sisters nursing wounds from unwise choices and selfish desires. Tristan thought of something that might help him beat the goblin.

"I wish for knowledge, Grondil," he said.

Grondil looked surprised. "A thinking man? I wouldn't have guessed from those thick arms and heavy brow. But knowledge is a tall order for a mere goblin, so here's my deal: fetch another axe to free me from this wood and I'll answer you one question, you'd better make it good."

"How do I know you'll speak the truth?" Tristan asked.

"Goblins can't lie with their eyes closed and you'll have your answer with mine shut."

Tristan went back to the shed and chose his heaviest axe, the one he used for chopping burls as hard as granite. He had recently sharpened it on his whetstone and the head was a mirrored crescent moon. He returned to the half-split round.

"There's a good lad. Now what dark secret do you want to know?" Grondil asked, closing his eyes.

Tristan stood quietly and the goblin in his heart stirred again, but he pushed it back down and asked, "Will this wood still burn?"

"Yes," Grondil said and for the briefest moment, with the sound of the letter 's' still on his worm eaten tongue, sunlight flashed in his just opening eyes as Tristan's axe cleaved the quartz air in a precise and silent arc.

That night, as cold November blew against his little house, Tristan composed his tale for the crowd at the Blind Sisters Tavern. And he discovered that Grondil had answered his question truthfully, although the wood spit sparks at him and made much foul smelling smoke.

❄

Bob Dennis lives in eastern Nevada with his wife and the usual assortment of animals. This is his first sale.

Ray Capella had been spending weeks hewing at a sick tree in his yard when we phoned and asked him to illustrate this story.

The Results of the Cauldron

Stories:

- 1st Place: **"Mother's Demon Helper" by P.E. Cunningham**
- 2nd Place: **"Gray Angel" by Lyn Nichols**
- 3rd Place: **"Killer Byte" by Mercedes Lackey**

Artwork:

- 1st Place: **Vincent Di Fate for "Killer Byte"**
- 2nd Place: **George Barr for "Mother's Demon Helper"**
- 3rd Place: **Ray Williams for "String Figures"**

Congratulations to all the winners! To vote for your favorites in *this* issue, use the ballot on page 64. Your interest and enthusiasm mean a lot to us at *FANTASY* Magazine.

The Last Word

Well, this issue has been a little harder to assemble than normal — and it's all my fault. I made a trip in Florida, and before I left I *thought* I'd made sure to check with all the artists. So when I returned, I phoned Nick Jainschigg, who was working on the cover for Jo Clayton's story "Dinner Music." Turned out he was still waiting for me to decide between two sketches he'd sent! By this time, other deadlines made his schedule too busy to finish our cover in time, so I asked him to finish it for issue #25, and in desperation I turned to David Cherry. David's advice about art direction has been invaluable since the day I took this job. "David, do you have any slides you could send me of artwork that could be a cover, but hasn't previously been published?" Bless his heart, he and his wife Davette pulled together some slides, and FedEx had them on my desk the next afternoon.

Next, Marion and I looked over the hold pile, but there were no cover-quality stories in it, much less one that would match any of David Cherry's artwork. Lisa, who works for Mrs. Bradley but is not on the magazine staff, came into the office to discuss something and as she left, I jokingly asked, "You wouldn't have time — before you leave for WesterCon in three days — to write a cover story, would you?"

Lisa stopped halfway down the stairs and came back into the office. "Actually, I would; I've had an idea kicking around in my head for a few days, possibly featuring one of the skaters I met at camp. Let me phone and ask her if it's okay to feature her in a story." [Lisa's hobby is ice-skating, and she trains with Olympic-class contenders at a camp in southern California when she can.]

Sharon was delighted, so Lisa worked half the night and presented me with six pages of manuscript the next morning, and with the completed story the morning after that. Now, *that's* a trouper!

I hope you enjoyed the story as much as I did — I tell you, waiting for the rest of the story after I'd read the first six pages was difficult.

Then, of course, there was the little matter of interior illustrations — we needed *five*. About the only person I know who can tackle an assignment with a deadline like that is James Balkovek (David was too busy to help with the interiors), so I phoned him. Two anxious days later he phoned back, I faxed him the story and an image of David Cherry's cover, and he started work.

(And you thought publishing was dull and staid, lacking excitement!)

So look forward to covers by Nick Jainschigg, Jill Bauman, and Bob Eggleton in coming months. And I'm going to be sure to check with them by phone more frequently from now on!

I'm writing this on the Fourth of July and we are still awaiting one set of artwork that's been in the mail since last Monday, and a photo that Katherine Kurtz is sending us from Ireland. I sure hope they get here tomorrow, since Wednesday morning I am leaving for a ten-day trip to attend ReaderCon and visit authors, and artists in New York!

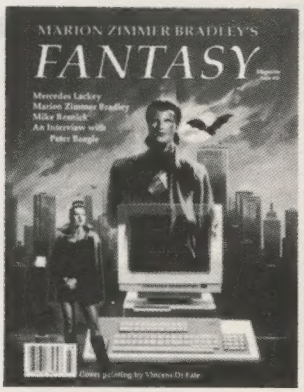
It's been three years since I attended an East Coast convention, and ReaderCon is supposed to be one of the best. I'll be at ComicCon in San Diego in August (with Stephanie Shaver, our new intern) and at World Fantasy Con in New Orleans in October. Marion and "Dr. Jane" Robinson will go to DarkoverCon in November, and Marion and I will attend RustyCon in Seattle, next January.

If you have enjoyed the magazine and see any of us at one of these events, do come up and say hello. My neighbor just got back from Bali, in southeast Asia, and said he found a bookstore there with lots of Marion's paperbacks. Marion's fans are everywhere, and she always enjoys meeting new ones!

— *Rachel E. Holmen*

Not *THAT* Kind of Fantasy!

One of the sf specialty bookshops in San Francisco, named "Fantasy, Etc.", is located next door to a porn theater, and the staff constantly has to explain the store's philosophy to new customers. Sometimes we (and our writers) have the same problem at Marion Zimmer Bradley's FANTASY MAgazine. Yet if we say our stories are about elves, dragons, and fairy princesses, some people think we're silly. I reply, "NOT!"



Fantasy has been described as the fiction of moral choices. Marion personally selects, for your enjoyment, stories which hinge on their characters' decisions between compelling alternatives.

Subscription rates are $16.00 per year. Canadian subs are $24.00 (payable in U.S. funds); overseas subscriptions are $38.00. All subscriptions, including Canadian, are payable directly in U.S. funds only. Please make checks payable to Marion Zimmer Bradley.

❑ Yes, I'm enclosing payment for the next four issues. Start my new subscription with the current issue.

❑ I don't want to miss any back issues, so here's my order for them as well. Please send me issues:

❑ 1 ❑ 2 ❑ 3 ❑ 5 ❑ 7 ❑ 8 ❑ 9 ❑ 10 ❑ 11 ❑ 12

❑ 13 ❑ 14 ❑ 15 ❑ 16 ❑ 17 ❑ 18 ❑ 19 ❑ 20 ❑ 21 ❑ 22

for $4.95 each plus $2.50 per order for postage. (Sorry; #4 & #6 sold out.)

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip _____

Marion Zimmer Bradley's *FANTASY* Magazine Box 249, Berkeley CA 94701

The Cauldron — Issue #24

Story	Artist
❑ **Ice Princess** by Elisabeth Waters	❑ David Cherry, cover
	❑ James Balkovek, interior art
❑ **The First Maxim** by Steven Piziks	❑ Margaret Organ-Kean
❑ **The Kestrel's Tears** by Kimberly Egan	❑ Dameon Willich
❑ **Wishful Thinking** by Jill Pollock	❑ Ann Chancellor
❑ **Hero for a Day** by Rebecca Lloyd	❑ Barb Armata
❑ **Bright Eyes** by Charles Gilman	❑ George Barr
❑ **No Greater Love** by Lisa Deason	❑ Rob Alexander
❑ **The Gargoyle's Burden** by L.S. Silverthorne	❑ Armand Cabrera
❑ **The Price of Beauty** by Julie Newcomb	❑ Gail Butler
❑ **The Woodman's Tale** by Bob Dennis	❑ Ray Capella

Vote for your favorite stories and artists, then send the ballot to:

Marion Zimmer Bradley's *FANTASY Magazine*
P.O. Box 249
Berkeley, CA 94701

If you'd rather not tear out this page, a photocopy is fine, or just write your choices LEGIBLY and send us a letter. Mark 1 for first, 2 for second, etc.

Want a subscription? An order blank is on page 63. A back issue order form is on page 29.

New from DAW Books!

TO GREEN ANGEL TOWER, Part II: Book 3 of *Memory, Sorrow and Thorn*
by Tad Williams

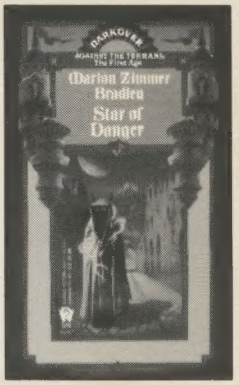
Simon and Miriamele undertake a dangerous quest through the war- and magic-torn lands, even as the call to battle goes out to all who would stand against the Storm King's seemingly unstoppable evil.

0-88677-606-6 **Fantasy** **$5.99/$6.99 in Canada** **July '94**

STAR OF DANGER: Against the Terrans/the First Age
by Marion Zimmer Bradley

When Terran Larry Montray and Kennard Alton, heir to the Alton Domain are forced to combine Darkover matrix magic with Terran technology to stand against a mutual enemy, will their personal alliance fracture the stability of both their cultures and bring about a new era in Terran-Darkovan relations?

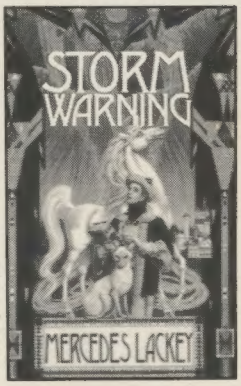
0-88677-607-4 **Science Fiction** **$4.99/$5.99 in Canada** **July '94**



STORM WARNING: Book One of *The Mage Storms* Trilogy
by Mercedes Lackey

In a war-ravaged Valdemar, Queen Selanay is attempting to effect a fragile new alliance with the neighboring kingdom of Karse. It is a venture that must not fail if either realm is to have any hope in surviving the coming confrontation with the Eastern Empire.

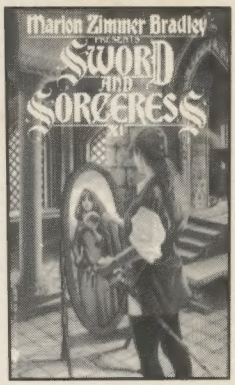
0-88677-611-2 **Fantasy** **$21.95/$27.99 in Canada** **Aug. '94**



SWORD & SORCERESS: XI
edited by Marion Zimmer Bradley

With sword and spell they traverse the many realms of sorcery and adventure-women who follow magic's siren call, and those who live their lives by blood and blade. Join Marion Zimmer Bradley, Diana Paxson, Jo Clayton, Deborah Wheeler and their companions in adventure on a trip to fantasy's farthest reaches.

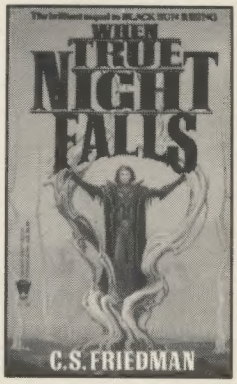
0-88677-614-7 **Fantasy** **$4.99/$5.99 in Canada** **Aug. '94**



WHEN TRUE NIGHT FALLS: Book Two of the *Coldfire* Trilogy
by C.S. Friedman

Determined to seek out and destroy the source of the *fae*-born evil that is rapidly strengthening its control over the world called Erna, will Damien and Tarrant find their own fragile alliance shattered by a power out to possess or destroy all of humankind?

0-88677-615-5 **Fantasy** **$5.99/$6.99 in Canada** **Sep. '94**



THE DOWNFALL MATRIX: The Patterns of Chaos #3
by Charles Ingrid

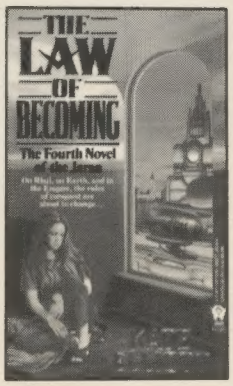
The alien polot Palation and the Earth human Ran are telepathically linked. Ran has fallen prey to his enemies, yet even as he reaches out to help the people of Palation's world, he risks destroying all Palaton's efforts to save his world and his race.

0-88677-616-3 **Science Fiction** **$4.99/$5.99 in Canada** **Sep. '94**

THE LAW OF BECOMING: The Fourth Novel of the Jaran
by Kate Elliott

When the human rebellion against the Chapalii Empire failed, the alien overlords made Charles Soerensen, leader of the rebellion, a duke in their empire. And in the heart of the Chapalii Empire, the most surprising move of all was about to occur as the Emperor added an unexpected new player to the Game of Princes.

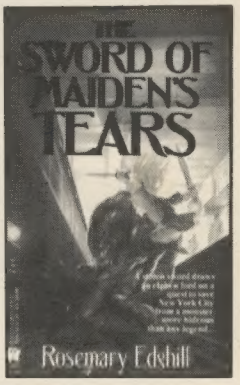
0-88677-580-9 **Science Fiction** **$5.99/$6.99 in Canada** **Oct. '94**



THE SWORD OF MAIDEN'S TEARS
by Rosemary Edghill

Ruth Marlowe, student librarian, was walking down a New York City street when she stumbled over the elf lord Rohanan, who'd been mugged and robbed of the most precious treasure of his house—the enchanted Sword of Maiden's Tears.

0-88677-622-8 **Fantasy** **$4.99/$5.99 in Canada** **Oct. '94**



DAW Books, Inc.

For our complete Catalog listing hundreds of DAW titles in print, please write:
Elsie B. Wollheim, DAW Books, Inc.
375 Hudson Street, New York, NY 10014

Distributed by PENGUIN USA

Coming in April 1994

CHANGING FATE

ELISABETH WATERS

"Will attract fans of Anne McCaffrey and Andre Norton... A sparkling addition to any fantasy collection. Four stars!" –Mercedes Lackey
FANTASY • 88677-UE2608 (CANADA $5.99) • U.S. $4.99
DAW No. 950
ELISABETH WATERS
CHANGING FATE

Lady Acila has been running her father's keep for as long as she can remember. Her father has spent most of his time away at war and her twin brother Briam is a daydreamer, a man obsessed with music and in no way suited to the practical job of managing the keep. But Acila doesn't mind—in fact she is desperate to remain in the secluded safety of her home, for she harbors a dark secret. Acila is a shapechanger—a being feared and despised by the people of her world.

But when the keep is besieged by the army of a Lord who brings proof of her father's death, Acila and Briam cannot defend their lands and must flee for their lives. Little does Acila realize as she leaves the only safe haven she has ever known, that she has begun a journey which will bring her to a greater understanding of her kind, and change her fate in ways she cannot begin to imagine.

Cover art by John Howe

0-88677-608-2/ORIGINAL
$4.99 ($5.99 in Canada)

DAW Books, Inc.

Publishers of Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Horror Since 1971

Distributed by
PENGUIN USA—MASS MARKET

For our complete Catalog listing hundreds of DAW titles in print, please write:

Elsie B. Wollheim
DAW Books, Inc.
375 Hudson Street
New York, NY 10014

DAW FANTASY